SERMONS

PREACH'D

Upon ſeveral Occaſions.

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SERMON I.

Isaiah IX. 12, 13, *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still: For the people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.*

SERMON II.

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SERMON V.

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SERMON VI.

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SERMON VIII.

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SERMON IX.

Matth. IX. 31, 32, *Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall*

ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, ſhall not be forgiven unto men

And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: But whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

SERMON X.

Acts X. 38.——*Who went about doing good.*

Isa. IX. 12, 13.

For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still: For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.

IN the former part of this 12th *verse*, the *Prophet* threatens that *Israel* should be brought into great distress, and set upon by Enemies on every side; *the Syrians before, and the Philistines behind*; and that they should *devour Israel with open mouth*: And though this was like to be a very sore and dreadful Judgment; yet he foretels that this would not stay Gods hand, nor satisfie his anger, because he foresaw that they would still grow worse, and continue impenitent.

For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill: For the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of Hoſts.

In which words there are theſe *two* things, very uſeful at all times, but at this time eſpecially moſt proper and ſeaſonable for our conſideration.

1. *The deſign and intention of God in ſending Judgments upon a People*; and that is, *to reclaim them from their ſins*, imply'd in theſe words, *For the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them*; which intimate to us, that this is the end which God aims at in his Judgments, to take us off from our ſins, and to bring us to himſelf.

2. The reaſon of the continuance of Gods Judgments; becauſe the people were not reclaimed by them. And this is fully expreſs'd in the *Text*, that therefore *Gods anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill, becauſe the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them*, &c.

Of theſe *Two* I crave leave to ſpeak as plainly and briefly as I can.

I. *The deſign and intention of God in ſending*

ſending Judgments upon a people; And that is *to reclaim them from their ſins.* This indeed is the intention of all Gods diſpenſations towards us in this World. The end of all his mercies and benefits, is to take us off from ſins, and to oblige and win us to our duty: So the *Apoſtle* tells us *Rom.* 2. 4, That the deſign of Gods *goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance towards us*, is, *to lead us to Repentance.*

And this is the way wherein God delights to deal with us. The way of Judgment and ſeverity is that which he is more averſe from, a courſe which he unwillingly takes with us, and not without ſome difficulty and reluctancy. *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*: And were it not that we are ſuch perverſe Creatures as not to be wrought upon by kindneſs, ſo wild as not to be tamed by gentle uſage, God would not handle us in any other way. It is our obſtinacy and intractableneſs to the methods of his goodneſ, which conſtraineth, and almoſt forceth him againſt his inclination, to take the Rod into his hand, and to chaſtiſe us with it. He would draw us with *the cords of love*, and *the bands of a man*,

(as he expresseth himself in the *Prophet*) but we will not follow him : And therefore we provoke him to turn these Cords into whips, and to change the gentle methods of his kindness into ways of harshness and severity.

And yet when he comes to take this course with us, he still, like a kind and tender-hearted Father, aims at our benefit and advantage. He designs kindness to the sons of men by all those judgments which do not kill them, and cut them off from the opportunity and possibility of improving them. If he send Evils upon us, it is that thereby he may do us some greater good : If he afflict us, it is not because it is pleasant to him to deal harshly with us, but because it is profitable and necessary for us to be so dealt with : And if at any time he imbitter our lives by miseries and sufferings, it is because he is loth to see us perish in pleasant ways, and chuseth rather to be somewhat severe towards us, than suffer us to be utterly undone.

This *Moses* declares to have been the great end of all the severe Providences of God towards the People of *Israel*, in their long wandring in the Wilderness, and all the difficulties and hardships they

they were there exercised withall for the space of forty years, *Deut.* 8. 15, 16: *Who led thee through that great and terrible Wilderness, wherein were fiery Serpents and Scorpions*, &c. *That he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.*

So that the afflicting providences of God are not only apt in their own nature to do us good, but which is a more express argument of the Divine goodness, God intends and aims at this end by them: He does not send Judgments upon this Theatre of the World for his sport and pastime, nor set on one part of his Creation to bait another for his own diversion: He does not, like some of the cruel *Roman* Emperours, take pleasure to exercise men with dangers, and to see them play bloody prizes before him.

Nay, he does nothing that is severe out of humour and passion, as our earthly Parents many times do. Indeed he is angry with us for our sins; but yet so as still to pity our persons: And when his Providence makes use of any sharp and cutting instruments, it is with this merciful design, to let out our corruption: If he cast us into the

Furnace of affliction, it is that he may refine and purifie us from our droſs.

So that though the Judgments of God be Evils in themſelves, yet conſidering the intention of God in them, they are no real objections againſt his goodneſs, but rather arguments for it; as will appear if we conſider theſe *three* things.

1. That the judgments of God are proper for the cure of a far greater Evil of another kind.

2. They are proper for the prevention of far greater Evils of the ſame kind.

3. They are not only proper to theſe Ends, but in many caſes very neceſſary.

Firſt, *The Judgments of God are very proper for the cure of a far greater Evil of another kind*; I mean the *Evil of ſin*. We take wrong meaſures of things, when we judg thoſe to be the greateſt Evils which afflict our bodies, wound our reputation, and impoveriſh our Eſtates. For thoſe certainly are far the greateſt, which affect our nobleſt part; which vitiate our underſtandings, and deprave our wills, and wound and defile our ſouls. What corrupt humours are to the body, that ſin is to the ſouls of

men,

men, their diſeaſe and their death.

Now it is very agreeable with the goodneſs and mercy of the Divine providence, to adminiſter to us whatever is proper for the cure of ſo great an evil. If we make our ſelves ſick, that is our own folly, and no fault of the Phyſitian; but we are beholden to him if he recover us, though it be by very bitter and unpleaſing means. All temporal Judgments which are ſhort of Death, are properly Medicinal; and if we will but ſuffer them to have their kindly operation upon us, they will work a cure; and how grievous and diſtaſtful ſoever they may be for the preſent, they will prove mercies and bleſſings in the iſſue. Upon this account *David* reckons afflictions among the happy bleſſings of his life, *Pſal.* 119. 72, *It is good for me* (ſaies he) *that I have been afflicted*; And he gives the reaſon of it in the ſame *Pſal.* ver. 67, *Before I was afflicted I went aſtray, but now have I learn'd thy precepts.*

So that though all afflictions are Evils in themſelves, yet they are good for us, becauſe they diſcover to us our diſeaſe, and tend to our cure. They are a ſenſible argument and conviction to us

of the evil and danger of sin. We are commonly such *fools* as *Solomon* speaks of, who *make a mock of sin*; and like Children, will be playing with the edge of it till it cut and wound us: We are not sufficiently sensible how great an evil it is, till we come to feel the dismal effects and consequences of it. And therefore to rectify our apprehensions concerning it, God makes us to suffer by it. Thus *Elihu* describes to us the happy effect of afflictions upon sinners, *Job* 36. 8, 9, 10, *If they be bound in fetters, and held in cords of affliction, then God sheweth them their work, and their transgression that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from their iniquity.* God doth but invite and entreat us by his mercies, but his Judgments have a more powerful and commanding voice. *When he holds men in cords of affliction, then he openeth their ear to discipline.* In prosperity we are many times incapable of counsel and instruction; but when we are under Gods correcting hand, then are we fit to be spoken withall.

Secondly, The Judgments of God are likewise *proper for the preventing of far greater*

greater evils of the ſame kind; I mean farther puniſhments. In ſending of temporal Judgments upon ſinners, God uſually proceeds with them by degrees: Firſt he lets flye ſeveral ſingle ſhots at them, and if upon theſe they will take warning and come in, they may prevent the broad-ſides and volleys of his wrath.

But the great advantage of all is, that temporal Judgments may prove to us the opportunities of preventing the miſerable and unſpeakable torments of a long Eternity. For all Judgments which are not final, leaving men a ſpace of Repentance, have in them the mercy of Reprieve, which by a ſerious and timely return to God, may be improv'd into a Pardon.

Beſides, that adverſity and afflictions do uſually diſpoſe men, and put them into a fit temper for Repentance; They fix our minds, and make us ſerious, and are apt to awaken us to conſideration, and ſuggeſt to us ſuch thoughts and meditations as theſe: If temporal evils be ſo grievous, how inſupportable then will be the extreme and endleſs torments of the next life? If in this day of Gods grace and patience we ſometimes meet

with

with ſuch ſeverity, what may we not look for in the day of vengeance? If theſe drops of Gods wrath which now and then fall upon ſinners in this world, fill them with ſo much anguiſh and affliction, how deplorably miſerable will thoſe wretches be, upon whom the ſtorms of his fury ſhall fall? Who would venture to continue in ſin, when the greateſt miſeries and calamities which we feel in this life, are but a ſmall and inconſiderable earneſt of thoſe woful wages which ſinners ſhall receive in the Day of Recompences?

Thirdly, The Judgments of God are *not only proper to theſe Ends, but in many caſes very neceſſary.* Our condition many times is ſuch, as to require this ſevere way of proceeding, becauſe no other courſe that God hath taken, or can take with us, will probably do us good. God does not delight in the miſeries and calamities of his Creatures, but we put him upon theſe extremities; or rather his own goodneſs and wiſdom together, do prompt and direct him to theſe harſh and rigorous ways. May be we have brought our ſelves into that dangerous ſtate, and the malignity of our diſtemper is ſuch, that it is not to be remov'd without

without violent Physick; and that cannot be administred to us without making us deadly sick.

So that the Judgments of God which are many times *abroad in the earth*, are nothing else but the wise Methods which the great Physitian of the World uses for the cure of Mankind; They are the Rods of his School, and the Discipline of his Providence, that *the inhabitants of the world may learn righteousness:* They are a merciful invention of Heaven, to do men that good which many times nothing else will; and to work that blessed effect upon us, which neither the wise counsels and admonitions of Gods Word, nor his milder and gentler dealings with us can usually attain.

Thus we find in the *Parable*, Luk. 15. that the Providence of God makes use of hunger and extreme necessity to bring home the *Prodigal*; and by him our Saviour represents to us the temper of most sinners: For till we have spent that stock of mercies which God hath given us, till we come to be pinch'd with want, and are *ready to perish*, we are not apt to entertain thoughts of *returning to our Father.*

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It may be there are ſome ſinners which are more tractable and eaſie to be reduced to goodneſs, that are not ſo headſtrong and obſtinate in their way, but that they may be reclaimed by milder and ſofter means: But there are likewiſe a great many ſenſleſs and outragious ſinners, who are madly and furiouſly bent upon their own ruin: Now to treat theſe fairly, with the allurements of kindneſs, and the gentle arts of perſwaſion, would be to no purpoſe: The only way that is left of dealing with them, is rigour and ſeverity. When ſinners are thus beſides themſelves, ſomething that looks like Cruelty is perhaps the greateſt mercy that can be ſhown to them; nothing ſo proper for ſuch perſons as a dark Room, and a ſpare Diet, and ſevere Uſage; *A Rod for the back of Fools*, as the *Wiſe-man* ſpeaks.

Thus have I done with the *firſt* thing I propounded to ſpeak to, *namely*, *The merciful deſign and intention of God in ſending Judgments upon a People*, which is, to bring them to Repentance, and by Repentance to prevent their Ruin. I proceed to the

II. *The Reaſon of the continuance of Gods*

Gods Judgments, *viz.* because the people were not reclaimed by them; therefore *his anger is not turned away, but* his hand is stretched out still, because *the people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.*

And how can it be expected it should be otherwise; When incorrigibleness under the Judgments of God is a provocation of so high a nature, a sign of a most deprav'd and incorrigible temper, and an argument of the greatest obstinacy in evil? Upon this account we find that the Holy *Spirit* of God in *Scripture* brands *Ahaz* as a singular and remarkable sort of sinner, (2 *Chron.* 28. 22.) because, *in the time of his distress he sinned yet more against the Lord.* The longer *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians* resisted the Judgments of God, the more still they were harden'd, and the more they were plagu'd: *Levit.* 26. 22, after God had there threatned his people with several sore Judgments for their sins, he tells them, that if they *will not be reform'd by all these things*, he will *punish them seven times more*, and after that *seven times more for their sins*: And if in such a case the just God will punish seven times more, we may safely conclude,

elude that sins after Judgments are seven times greater.

So likewise, *Deut.* 28, after a long and dreadful Catalogue of Curses there denounc'd against the people of *Israel* in case of their disobedience, God at last threatens them with a Forreign *Enemy*, that should *distress them in their gates*; And if they would not be reclaim'd by all this, he tells them, That he hath still more and greater Judgments for them in store, *v.* 58, *and* 59, *If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law, that thou mayest fear this great and glorious Name*, THE LORD THY GOD, *then the Lord will make thy Plagues wonderful.* If we be of so strange and monstrous a disposition, as to grow worse under Judgments, God will deal with us after an unusual and prodigious manner, he will make our *plagues wonderful.*

This incorrigible temper the *Prophets* of old every where make the great aggravation of the sin of *Israel*, Isa. 1. 4, 5, *Ah sinful Nation! a people laden with iniquity*; and after a great many other expressions to set forth what heinous sinners they were, he sums up all in this, That they were so far from being reform'd by the several Judgments of God which had been

been inflicted upon them, that they were the worse for correction; *Why should they be stricken any more? they will revolt more and more.* So likewise, *Hos.* 7. 9, 10, *Ephraim*, though brought very low, is represented as of the same refractory temper, *Strangers have devour'd his strength*, &c. *But they do not return to the Lord, nor seek him for all this.* I will mention but one *Text* more (and methinks it bears but too near a resemblance with our own condition, both in respect of the judgments which have been upon us, and our carriage under them) *Amos* 4. where God upbraids his people several times with this, as the great aggravation of their sins, That they continued impenitent under all those terrible Judgments of God which had been upon them; *I have sent among you* (says he) *Famine*; and then *Pestilence*; and then the *Sword*; and last of all a terrible *Fire* which had almost utterly consumed them, *vers.* 11. *I have overthrown some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand pluckt out of the burning: yet have*

ye

ye not return'd unto me. And becauſe all theſe Judgments had not been effectual to reclaim them, He tells them that he was reſolved to go on in puniſhing; and therefore he bids them to expect it and prepare themſelves for it, *verſ.* 12, *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Iſrael; and becauſe I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Iſrael.* When God hath begun to puniſh a people, and they are not amended by it, the honour of his Juſtice is concern'd to proceed, and not to give over. By every ſin that we commit, we offend God; but if he ſmite us, and we ſtand out againſt him, then do we contend with him, and ſtrive for maſtery. And when the ſinner is upon theſe ſtubborn and inſolent terms, then *prepare to meet thy God*; A bitter *Sarcaſme*, as if man could be a match for God, and a poor weak creature in any wiſe able to encounter him to whom Power belongs. There's a ſevere expreſſion concerning Gods dealing with ſuch perverſe and obſtinate ſinners, *Pſal.* 18. 26, *With the froward thou wilt ſhew thy ſelf froward,*

froward, or, as the words may more properly and conveniently be render'd, *with the froward thou wilt wrestle.* God will not be outbrav'd by the sins of men; and therefore, if we continue impeninent, we have all the reason in the world to expect that God will go on to punish.

But to come nearer to our selves, and to consider our own case, which is in truth so very bad, that we may almost be afraid to consider it. The wise and good God, like a prudent and indulgent Father, hath used all the arts of his Providence towards this Nation, to reclaim us. He hath invited us to him by many blessings, but we would not come; so (to borrow an apt illustration from a great Divine of our own) we have forced him to deal with us as *Absalom* did with *Joab*; he sent one civil message to him after another, but he would not come; at last he sets on fire his Corn-field to try whether that would bring him: This course God hath taken with us; we would not be perswaded by mes-

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ſages of kindneſs (by his many bleſſings and favours) to return to him, and therefore hath he ſent amongſt us the terrible meſſengers of his wrath. Firſt we were engag'd in a *Foreign War*; and though God was pleas'd to give us ſome conſiderable ſucceſs in it, yet it ſeems our provocations were ſo great, that he was reſolv'd to puniſh us. He was loth to let us *fall into the hands of men*; and therefore he took the work into his own hand, and puniſh'd us himſelf, by ſending *a Peſtilence* amongſt us, the foreſt and moſt deſtructive that hath befallen this Nation for many Ages. But we did not upon this, return to him; and therefore his fierce anger kindled a fearful *Fire* amongſt us, which hath laid the honour of our Nation, one of the greateſt and richeſt Cities in the World in the duſt; and that by ſo ſudden and irreſiſtible, ſo diſmal and amazing a devaſtation as, in all the circumſtances of it, is ſcarce to be parallel'd in any Hiſtory.

I doubt not but moſt of us were mightily affected with this Judgment

whilſt

whilst it was upon us. So astonishing a calamity could not but make us open our eyes a little, and awaken us to consideration; Even the *rich-man* in the *Gospel*, though he had all his life-time been immers'd in sensuality, yet could not but *lift up his eyes when he was in Flames.*

And surely God expects, that such Judgments as these should not only rouze us a little for the present, but that they should have a permanent operation and effect upon us, and work a thorough and lasting reformation amongst us; but yet I am afraid that this dreadful Fire hath had no other influence upon us, but what it uses to have upon Metals, which are only melted by it for the present, but when the Fire is removed, they suddenly cool and return to their former hardness.

One would have thought, that the sense of such a calamity as this, should have remain'd longer upon us. Methinks God seem'd to say to us after this Judgment, as he did once to *Je-*

rusalem, Zeph. 3. 7, *Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction*; but we (like them) have been but the more forward to provoke him, (*they rose early, and corrupted their doings*) we have after all this *harden'd our hearts from his fear, and refused to return.* And therefore God is now come to one of his last Judgments, *Our Enemy distresseth us in our Gates.* God hath begun to *let us fall into the hands of men*, and by giving our Enemies a sudden and fatal advantage upon us, hath smitten us with *a Breach great as the Sea.*

These were terrible calamities indeed to come so thick and so swiftly upon us, *like desolation, and as a Whirlwind.* Such a quick succession of Judgments, treading almost upon one anothers heels, does but too plainly declare that God is highly incens'd against us. For surely these are not the wounds of a Friend, but the terrible assaults of an Enemy. They do not look like the displeasure of a Father, but the severity of a Judge; not like *visitation*, but like *vengeance.*

And

And besides these more visible Judgments upon the Nation, we are by a secret curse of God insensibly decayed in our riches and strength. We are, I know not how, strangely impoverisht in the midst of plenty, and almost undone by victories. And which adds to our misery, few among us seem to be sufficiently sensible of it, or to take any notice by what silent steps and imperceptible degrees (like gray hairs and the infirmities of old age) poverty and weakness are stealing in upon us: so that we may fitly apply to our selves, as what the *Prophet* says of *Ephraim*, *Hos.* 7. 9, *Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea gray hairs are here and there upon him, and yet he knoweth it not.*

And our condition, as we are a *Church*, is not much better. How is this famous *Protestant Church* of ours, which was once the *admiration* of her Friends, and the envy of her Enemies, sunk and declin'd in her glory, and reduc'd into a very narrow compass? So that she is *left* like *the*

Daughter of Sion, (*Isa.* 1.8.) *as a Cottage in a Vineyard, as a Lodge in a garden of Cucumbers, as a besieged City*; straitned and hem'd in on all parts, by the impudence of *Atheism*, the insolencies of *Popery*, and the turbulency of *Faction*; all which do every day visibly and apace gain ground upon her, and distress her on every side; just as the condition of the *Jewish* Church is describ'd before my Text, *The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind, both ready to devour Israel with open mouth.*

And surely it is not for nothing that God hath brought us thus low, that he hath sent all these Judgments upon us, and that he doth still threaten us with more: The reason is plain, because we are still impenitent; *the people turneth not to him that smiteth them.* There hath been almost an universal degeneracy amongst us, and there is still, I fear, a general impenitency, *the people turneth not*, &c. Not withstanding all those dismal Calamities which our eyes have seen, wickedness doth still prevail in the Nation, and overflows it like a

mighty

mighty Deluge; ſo as to overſpread all ranks and Oders of men: And not only ſo, but is grown impudent, and appears *with a whores forehead*; all kind of modeſty ſeems to have forſaken the ſinners of this Age.

And is this Repentance? to live in filthy and abominable luſts, to tear the Name of God by horrid Oaths and Imprecations; to be Atheiſtical and prophane, and by an unexampled boldneſs to turn the *Word of God* it ſelf, and the graveſt and moſt ſerious matters of Religion into *Raillery?* This is not *to turn to him that ſmiteth us*, but to turn upon him and ſmite him again. And yet ſuch crying and clamorous ſins as theſe, are almoſt come to be the garb and faſhion of the Nation, and to be accounted the wit and gallantry of the Age.

And *Shall not God viſit for theſe things? ſhall not his ſoul be aveng'd on ſuch a Nation as this?* Yes, he hath viſited; and 'tis for theſe things that *the wrath of God* hath been ſo manifeſtly *revealed from Heaven* a-

gainſt us. For this cauſe, *miſery and deſtruction* have been *in our way, and the way of peace have we not known*, becauſe there hath been *no fear of God before our eyes.* Hence it is, that *God's anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill, becauſe the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of Hoſts.*

But do not we *ſeek God*? Do we not every day acknowledg our ſins to him, and pray that he would *have mercy upon us miſerable offenders*, and *grant, that we may hereafter live godly, righteous and ſober lives?* Do not we *ſeek the Lord of Hoſts*, when we continually beg of him to ſave and *deliever us from the hand of our enemies?* Indeed we do thus *ſeek* him, but we ſhould firſt *turn to him*; otherwiſe, if we hope our prayers will prevail with God to do us good, we do but *truſt in lying words.* If we go on in our ſins, our very prayers will *become ſin*, and encreaſe our guilt: For *the prayer of the wicked* (that is, of one that is reſolv'd to continue ſo) *is an abomination to the Lord.*

Lord. Can we think it reasonable for men to address themselves to God after this manner? *Lord, though we have no mind to turn to thee, yet we pray thee turn away thine anger from us; though we are resolv'd not to forsake our sins, yet we make no doubt but that thy mercy will forgive them; Give peace in our time, O Lord, that we may pursue our lusts securely and without disturbance: Deliver us, we pray thee, from the hands of our Enemies, that we may sin against thee without fear all the days of our lives.* Would it not be horrible impudence and impiety to put up any such petitions to God? And yet this, I fear, is the most genuine interpretation of our prayers and lives compar'd together.

And if this be our case, what can we expect? God may give us peace with our Enemies, but then he will find out some other way to punish us: For if we still persist in our Atheism and Prophaneness, in our contempt of God and of his holy Worship, in our scorn and derision of Religion, in our abominable lusts and horrid

horrid impieties, what can we look for, but that God ſhould *be angry with us until he have conſum'd us, and there be no eſcaping*? Nothing can be a ſadder preſage of our ruin, than not to be reform'd by thoſe dreadful judgments of God which have been upon us. This was that which brought final deſtruction upon the *Egyptians* in the *Red Sea*, that they had held out ſo obſtinately againſt ſo many Judgments, and had been *hardned under ten plagues*. To be impenitent after ſuch ſevere corrections, is to poyſon our ſelves with that which is intended for our Phyſick, and by a *miraculous* kind of obſtinacy to turn the *Rods* of God into *Serpents*.

And now perhaps ſome will be apt to ſay, That theſe are things fit for men of our *Profeſſion*, becauſe it is our Trade and we live by it. Indeed they are ſo, things very fit to be ſaid, and withall very fit for every one to conſider, who profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian, and who owns the belief of a God, and a Providence, and another World. And if they be ſo, where is the fault? Is it,

that

that there is a peculiar Profeſſion of men whoſe proper work it is to tell men of their faults, and to perſwade them to reform? No, there is no harm in that neither. Is it then that They live by their Profeſſion, and yet would be believed? Yes, there lies the force of the objection. To which I ſhall only at preſent return this anſwer, That men do not argue thus in other caſes, where yet the reaſon ſeems to be the very ſame. In matters that concern their *Bodies* and *Eſtates*, the *Phyſitian* and the *Lawyer* are believ'd, though it is verily thought that they live by their Profeſſions as well as we; why then ſhould men deal ſo partially and unequally only with their *Souls*? were we not mov'd by better principles, and ſway'd by the arguments and conſiderations of another World, we might, for ought we know, with every whit as much advantage to our ſelves, ſuffer men to be quiet, and to ſleep on ſecurely in their ſins; If we did not believe our ſelves in theſe matters, what ſhould hinder, but that we might with as much

gravity

gravity and confidence cry Peace, Peace, when there is no Peace; and flatter men with as much art, and with as good a grace as any of those can do, who *live delicately, and wear soft clothing?*

But *we believe* the threatnings of God, and *therefore do we speak: We know the terrour* of the Lord, and therefore we endeavour to *perswade men.* And O! that we could perswade them to *break off their sins by righteousness*, and to *turn every one from the evil of his way, and from the violence that is in his hands:* And then, *who can tell but God may turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not.*

The good God make us all wise, to know in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes; and grant that we may all turn to him that hath smitten us, by Repentance and real Reformation of our lives; that God may be pleas'd to

turn

turn away his Anger from us, and to stretch out his hand for our Deliverance; which we humbly beg of him for the sake of Christ. To whom with the Father, &c.

A

Heb. III. 13.

Exhort one another daily while it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Mong the many considerations which the Word of God and our own Reason offer to us to discourage us from sin, this is none of the least considerable, that he that once engages in a vicious course is in danger to proceed in it, being insensibly trained on from one degree of wickedness to another: so that the farther he advanceth, his retreat grows more difficult, because he is still pushed on with a greater violence. All errour, as well of practise as of judgment, is endless; and when a man is once out of the way, the farther he shall go on, the harder he will

will find it to return into the right way. Therefore there is great reason why men should he often cautioned against the beginnings of sin: or if they have been so unhappy as to be engaged in a bad course, why they should be warned to break it off presently and without delay, lest by degrees they be hardened in their wickedness, till their case grow desperate and past remedy. And to this purpose is the *Apostles* advice here in the *Text*; *Exhort one another daily while it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

From which words I shall

1. Endeavour to represent to you the growing danger of sin; and by what steps and degrees bad habits do insensibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil course.

2. I shall from this consideration take occasion to shew what great reason and need there is to warn men of this danger; and to endeavour to rescue them out of it. And then

3. I shall apply my self to the duty here in the Text, of *exhorting* men with all earnestness and importunity to resist the beginings of sin; or if they be already

ready entred upon a wicked course, to make haste out of this dangerous state; *lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

I. *First*, I shall endeavour to represent to you the growing danger of sin; and by what steps and degrees bad habits do insensibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil course. All the actions of men which are not natural, but proceed from deliberation and choice, have something of difficulty in them, when we begin to practise them; because at first we are rude and unexercised in that way: but after we have practised them awhile, they become more easie: And when they are easie, we begin to take pleasure in them: And when they please us, we do them frequently, and think we cannot repeat them too often: And by frequency of acts a thing grows into a habit: And a confirmed habit is a second kind of Nature: And so far as anything is natural, so far it is necessary, and we can hardly do otherwise; nay, we do it many times when we do not think of it. For by vertue of a habit, a mans mind or body becomes plyable and enclined to such kind of actions as it is accustomed

customed to, and does as it were stand bent and charged such a way; so that being touched and awakened by the least occasion, it breaks forth into such or such actions. And this is the natural progress of all habits indifferently considred, whether they be good or bad.

But vicious habits have a greater advantage, and are of a quicker growth. For the corrupt nature of a man is a rank soil, to which vice takes easily, and wherein it thrives apace. The mind of man hath need to be prepared for piety and vertue; it must be cultivated to that end, and ordered with great care and pains: But vices are weeds that grow wild and spring up of themselves. They are in some sort natural to the soil, and therefore they need not to be planted and watered, 'tis sufficient if they be neglected and let alone. So that vice having this advantage from our nature, it is no wonder if occasion and temptation easily draw it forth.

But that we may take a more distinct account of the progress of sin, and by what steps vice gains upon men, I shall mark out to you some of the chief and more observable gradations of it.

1. Men

1. Men begin with leſſer ſins. No man is perfectly wicked on the ſudden. *Sunt quædam vitiorum elementa*; *there are certain rudiments of vice*, in which men are firſt entered, and then they proceed by degrees, to greater and fouler crimes. For ſin hath its infancy and tender age, and its ſeveral ſtates of growth. Men are not ſo totally degenerate but at firſt they are aſhamed when they venture upon a known ſin, though it be but ſmall in compariſon. Hence it is that at firſt men are very ſollicitous to palliate and hide their faults by excuſes; but after they have frequently committed them, and they grow too viſible to be concealed, then they will attempt to defend and maintain them; and from thence they come by degrees to take pleaſure in them, and in thoſe that do the ſame things. *Juven.*

2. After men have been ſome time initiated in theſe leſſer ſins, by the commiſſion of theſe they are prepared and diſpoſed for greater: ſuch as lay waſte the conſcience, and offer more violence to the light and reaſon of their minds. By degrees a ſinner may grow to be ſo hardy as to attempt thoſe crimes which at firſt he could not have had the thought

of committing without horrour. Like *Hazael*, who when he was told by the Prophet *Elisha* what barbarous cruelties he should one day be guilty of towards the people of *Israel*, when he shoud come to be King of *Syria*, he abominated the very thought and mention of them; *Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?* and yet, for all this, we know he did it afterward. 'Tis true indeed when a sinner is first tempted to the commission of a more gross and notorious sin, his conscience is apt to boggle and start at it, he doth it with great difficulty and regret; the terrours of his own mind, and the fears of damnation, are very troublesome to him: But this trouble wears off by degrees; and that which at first was difficult, does by frequent practice and long custome become tolerable.

3. When a man hath proceeded thus far, he begins to put off shame, one of the greatest restraints from sin which God hath laid upon humane nature. And when this curb once falls off, there is then but little left to restrain and hold us in. At first setting out upon a vicious course men are a little nice and delicate, like young Travellers, who at first are offend-

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ed at every ſpeck of dirt that lights upon them; but after they have been accuſtomed to it, and have travelled a good while in foulways, it ceaſeth to be troubleſome to them to be daſhed and beſpatter'd.

4. After this, it is poſſible, men may come to approve their vices. For if mens judgments do not command their Wills and reſtrain their luſts, it is great odds in proceſs of time the vicious inclinations of their Wills will put a falſe byaſs upon their judgments; And then it is no wonder if men come to boaſt of their ſins, and to glory in their vice, when they are half perſwaded that they are generous and commendable qualities. Thus much is certain in experience, that ſome men have gotten ſo perfect a habit of ſome ſins, as not to know and take notice many times when they commit them: As in the caſe of ſwearing, which ſome men have ſo accuſtomed themſelves to, that without any conſideration they do of courſe put an oath or two into every ſentence that comes from them. And it hath been obſerved of ſome perſons that they have told an untruth ſo often, and averr'd it with ſo much confidence, till at laſt, forgetting that it was a lie at

first, they themselves have in process of time believed it to be true.

5. From this pitch of wickedness men commonly proceed to draw in others, and to make proselytes to their vices. Now this signifies not only a great approbation of sin, but even a fondness for it, when men are not content to sin upon their own single accounts, but they must turn zealous agents and factors for the Devil; become *teachers* of sin and *ministers of unrighteousness*, and are factiously concerned to propagate together with their Atheistical principles their lewd practices, and to draw followers and Disciples after them.

And when they are arrived to this height, it is natural for them to hate reproof, and to resist the means of their recovery; to quarrel against all the remedies that shall be offered to them, and to count those their greatest enemies who have so mnch courage and kindness as to deal plainly with them, and to tell them the truth. And then all the wise counsels of Gods Word, and the most gentle and prudent admonitions in the world, when they are tendered to such persons, serve only to provoke their scorn or their passion. And surely that man is in a sad case,

caſe, that is ſo diſpoſed, that in all probability he will turn the moſt effectual means of his amendment into the occaſion of new and greater ſins.

But that which renders the condition of ſuch perſons much more ſad and deplorable is, that all this while God is withdrawing his grace from them. For every degree of ſin cauſeth the Holy Spirit of God with all his bleſſed motions and aſſiſtances to retire farther from them: And not only ſo, but the Devil (that evil *Spirit* which the *Scripture* tells us, *works effectually in the children of diſobedience*) does according as men improve in wickedneſs, get a greater and a more eſtabliſh'd dominion over them. For as they who are reclaimed from an evil courſe, are ſaid in *Scripture* to be *reſcued out of the ſnare of the Devil*, and to be *turned from the power of Satan unto God*; So, on the other hand, the farther men advance in the ways of ſin, ſo much the farther they depart from God, from under the influences of his grace, and the care of his protection and providence; and they give the Devil, (who is not apt to neglect his advantages upon them) greater opportunities every day to gain the firmer poſſeſſion of them.

And thus, by paſſing from one degree of ſin to another, the ſinner becomes hardened in his wickedneſs, and does inſenſibly ſlide into that ſtate in which without a miraculous grace of God he is like for ever to continue. For the mind of man, after it hath been long accuſtomed to evil, and is once grown old in vice, is almoſt as hard to be rectified, as it is to recover a body bowed down with age to its firſt ſtreightneſs. The *Scripture* ſpeaks of ſome that *commit ſin with greedineſs*, and *that drink up iniquity as the Oxe drinketh up water*, with a mighty appetite and thirſt, as if they were not able to refrain from it. And to exprſs to us the miſerable condition of ſuch perſons, it repreſenteth them as perfect ſlaves to their vices, that have *ſold* themſelves to do wickedneſs, and *are led captive by Satan at his pleaſure.* And when men have brought themſelves to this paſs, they are almoſt under a fatal neceſſity of ſinning on. I do not believe that God hath abſolutely predeſtinated any man to ruin; but by a long courſe of wilful ſins men may in a ſort predeſtinate themſelves to it, and chooſe wickedneſs ſo long till it almoſt becomes neceſſary; and till they have brought themſelves under all imaginable

diſad-

disadvantages of contributing any thing towards their own recovery; being bound in the chains of their own wickedness, and held in the cords of their sins: Nay, like *Sampson*, not only bound by those lusts which they have embraced, but likewise robbed of all their strength whereby they should break loose from those bonds. God grant that none of us may ever have the woful experience of it: But I am horribly afraid it is too true, that a sinner may arrive to that confirmed state of impiety as almost totally to lose his liberty to do better: He may attain to that perfection in vice, as to continue to be a bad man upon the same account that the *Historian* extravagantly says *Cato* was virtuous, *Vell. Patere.*
quia aliter esse non potuit; *because he could not be otherwise. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?* It is the *Scripture*-comparison to set forth to us how hard a thing it is for a man to be brought to goodness, that hath been long accustomed to do evil. He that is thus deeply engaged and entangled in a bad course, will scarce ever have the heart and resolution to break loose from it, unless he be forced violently out of it by some severe affliction, by a sharp sickness,

or

or by a terrible calamity, or by the present apprehensions of death and the terrours of a future Judgment. Nor will these be effectual neither to change such a person, without an extraordinary degree of Gods grace; which considering the greatness and the continuance of his provocations, he hath very little reason to expect or hope God should ever bestow upon him. Wretched man! that hast brought thy self into this miserable state, out of which there is but just a possibility left of thy being rescued: that hast neglected thy disease so long, till it is almost too late to apply remedies: that hast provoked God so far, and sinned to such a prodigious height, that thou hast reason almost to despair both of his grace and assistance for thy repentance, and of his mercy for thy pardon. I speak not this to discourage even the greatest of sinners from repentance. Though their case be extremely difficult, yet it is not quite desperate. For *those things which seem impossible with men, are possible with God.* But I speak it on purpose to stop sinners in their course; and to discourage men from going on in sin till they be hardened through the deceitfulness of it; and have brought

brought themſelves by inſenſible degrees into that dangerous and difficult ſtate which I have all this while been repreſenting to you. I come now to the

II. *Second* thing I propounded, which was, from this conſideration to ſhew what great reaſon and need there is to warn men of this danger; and to endeavour to reſcue them out of it. The *Apoſtle* directs this precept to all Chriſtians. *Exhort one another daily, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* That is, leſt you be hardened by degrees, and be finally ruined. And ſurely, every man is concerned to do what in him lies to reſcue his brother from ſo imminent a danger; It is every ones place and duty to endeavour to ſave thoſe whom he ſees ready to periſh: Much more does it concern thoſe who are peculiarly ſet apart for this work; I mean, the Minſters of Gods holy Word; whoſe proper office and buſineſs it is to *exhort* and *warn every man day and night*; who are *ſet as watchmen to the houſe of Iſrael*; and *whoſe blood*, in caſe any of them miſcarry through our neglect, *ſhall be required at our hands.* So that if we believe the threatnings of God,

God, which we declare to others; if we have any apprehenſion of the dreadful miſery of another world; if we have any ſenſe of our own duty and ſafety; if we have any pity for periſhing ſouls, we cannot but be very importunate with ſinners to look about them, and to conſider their danger, and to bethink themſelves ſeriouſly of the miſerable event and iſſue of a wicked life: We cannot but be earneſt with them to *break off their ſins, and to give glory to God by repentance, before darkneſs come, and their feet ſtumble upon the dark mountains.* When we are convinced more fully than we can deſire, that *miſery and deſtruction are in their ways*; when we plainly ſee the *evil day* haſting toward them a-pace, and *deſtruction coming upon them like a whirlwind*; heaven above threatning them, and *hell beneath moving her ſelf to meet them at their coming*, can we poſſiby do leſs than to warn ſuch perſons to *flee from the wrath which is to come*, and out of a ſad apprehenſion of the danger that hangs over them, to caution them againſt it, and endeavour with all our might to reſcue them from the miſery which is ready to ſwallow them up? Indeed one would be apt to think it a very vain thing

to diſſwade men from being miſerable; to uſe great vehemency of argument to hinder a man from leaping into a pit, or from running into the fire; to take great pains to argue a ſick man into a deſire of health, and to make a priſoner contented to have his ſhackles knocked off, and to be ſet at liberty; one would think all this were perfectly needleſs: But yet we ſee in experience ſin is a thing of ſo ſtupifying a nature, as to make men inſenſible of their danger, although it be ſo near, and ſo terrible. It is not ſo with men in other caſes: When we labour of any bodily diſtemper, it is much to find a man that is patient of his diſeaſe; but when our ſouls are mortally ſick, that we ſhould be contented with our condition, and fond of our diſeaſe, that we ſhould fight with our Phyſitian, and ſpurn at our remedy; this ſurrely is the height of diſtraction, for men to be thus abſolutely bent upon their own ruin, and to reſolve to make away themſelves for ever. And we who are the Meſſengers of God to men, muſt be born of the rocks, and have hearts *harder than the nether milſtone*, if we can patiently look on and endure to ſee men periſh, without uſing our utmoſt endeavour to ſave them. Therefore I ſhall in the

III. *Third* and *last* place apply my ſelf to this work of *Exhortation*, the duty commanded here in the Text. And here I ſhall addreſs my ſelf to *two* ſorts of perſons.

1. To perſwade thoſe who are yet innocent of great crimes, to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin, leſt it gain upon them by degrees.

2. To preſs and urge thoſe that are already entered upon a wicked courſe, that they would make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate; *leſt*, at laſt, *they be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

1. To perſwade thoſe who are yet in ſome meaſure innocent, to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin leſt it gain upon them by degrees. Vice may eaſily be diſcouraged at firſt. 'Tis like a ſlight diſeaſe; which is eaſie to be cured, but dangerous to be neglected. The firſt approaches of ſin and temptation are uſually very modeſt; but if they be not diſcountenanced they will ſoon grow upon us, and make bolder attempts. Every inclination to ſin, every compliance with temptation is a going down the hill: While we keep our ſtanding we may command our ſelves; but if we once put our

ſelves

ſelves into violent motion downward, we cannot ſtop when we pleaſe.

Omne in præcipiti vitium ſtetit——

All Vice ſtands upon a Precipice; and to engage in any ſinful courſe, is to run down the hill. And if we once let looſe the propenſions of our nature, we cannot gather in the reins and govern them as we pleaſe: If we give way to *preſumptuous ſins*, they will quickly get *dominion over us*. It is much eaſier not to begin a bad courſe, than to put a ſtop to our ſelves after we have begun it: *Stulta res eſt nequitiæ modus*. 'Tis a fond thing for a man to think to ſet bounds to himſelf in any thing that is bad; to reſolve to ſin in number, weight and meaſure, with great temperance and diſcretion, and government of himſelf: That he will commit this ſin, and then give over; entertain but this one temptation, and after that he will ſhut the door and admit of no more. Our corrupt hearts when they are once in motion, they are like the raging ſea, to which we ſet no bounds, nor ſay to it *hitherto thou ſhalt go and no further*. Sin is very cunning and deceitful, and does ſtrangely gain upon men

Seneca.

men when they once give way to it. It is of a very bewitching nature, and hath ſtrange arts of addreſs and inſinuation: The giving the way to a ſmall ſin does marvelloſly prepare and diſpoſe a man for a greater: By giving way to one little vice after another, the ſtrongeſt reſolution may be broken. For though it be not to be ſnapt in ſunder at once, yet by this means it is untwiſted by degrees, and then 'tis eaſie to break it one thread after another. 'Tis ſcarce imaginable of what force one ſinful action is to produce more: For ſin is very teeming and fruitful; and though there be no *bleſſing* annext to it, yet it does ſtrangely *encreaſe and multiply.* As there is a connexion of one virtue with another, ſo vices are linkt together, and one ſin draws many after it. When the Devil tempts a man to commit any wickedneſs, he does as it were lay a long train of ſins; and if the firſt temptation take, they give fire to one another. Let us then reſiſt the beginnings of ſin; becauſe then we have moſt power, and ſin hath leaſt. This is the *firſt.*

2. To perſwade thoſe who are already engaged in a wicked courſe, to make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate. And there is no other way to get out of it but by repentance;

pentance; that is, by a real change and reformation of our lives; for herein the nature of true repentance does consist. And without this all the devices which men use, to get rid of the guilt of their sins, are vain and to no purpose. 'Tis not to be done by a formal confession and absolution, nor by a long pilgrimage, nor by one of those little Tickets from *Rome*, which they call *Indulgences*. A wise man would much sooner perswade himself that God would not at all punish the sins of men, than that he would forgive them so easily, and receive great offenders to favour upon such slight terms. Let us not deceive our seleves; there is one plain way to Heaven, *viz.* sincere repentance, and a holy life; and there is no getting thither by tricks. And without this change of our lives, all our sorrow, and fasting, and humiliation for sin, which at this season we make profession of, will signifie nothing. There is an excellent passage of the Son of *Syrach* to this purpose, *Eccles.* 34, 25, 26, *He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? so is it with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things, who will hear his prayer, or*

what doth his humbling profit him? There is this plain difference between trouble for ſin and repentance; ſorrow only reſpects ſins paſt, but repentance is chiefly preventive of ſins for the future: And God therefore requires that we ſhould be troubled for our ſins, that we may reſolve to leave them.

And to obbige us to a vigorous and ſpeedy reſolution in this matter, let us conſider that we have engaged too far already in a bad courſe; and that every day our retreat will grow more dangerous and difficult; that by our delays we make work for a ſadder and longer repentance than that which we do now ſo ſtudiouſly decline: Let us conſider likewiſe, that our life is concerned in the caſe; that *except we repent and turn, we ſhall die?* and that the evil day may overtake us, while we are deliberating whether we ſhould avoid it or not: that vice is ſo far from being mortified by age, that by every days continuance in it we encreaſe the power of it; and ſo much ſtrength as we add to our diſeaſe, we certainly take from our ſelves: And this is a double weakning of us, when we do not only loſe our own ſtrength, but the enemy gets it, and imploys it againſt us. The deceit-

ceitfulneſs of ſin appears in nothing more than in keeping men off from this neceſſary work, and perſwading them to hazard all upon the unreaſonable hopes of the mercy of God, and the uncertain reſolution of a future repentance. I do not think there are any here but do either believe, or at leaſt are vehemently afraid that there is another life after this; and that a wicked life, without repentance, muſt unavoidably make them miſerable in another world; and that to caſt off all to a death-bed repentance, puts things upon a mighty hazard. And they have a great deal of reaſon to think ſo: For alas, how unfit are moſt men at ſuch a time for ſo great and ſerious a work as repentance is, when they are unfit for the ſmalleſt matters: And how hard is it for any man, then to be aſſured of the truth and reality of his repentance, when there is no ſufficient opportunity to make tryal of the ſincerity of it. I deny not the poſſibility of the thing; but it is much to be feared that the repentance of a dying ſinner is uſually but like the ſorrow of a malefactor when he is ready to be turned off; he is not troubled that he hath offended the Law, but he is troubled that he muſt die. For when death is ready to

eiz e upon the ſinner, and he feels himſelf dropping into deſtruction, no wonder if then the mans ſtomack come down, and he be contented to be ſaved; and ſeeing he muſt ſtay no longer in this world, be deſirous to go to Heaven rather than Hell; and in order to that, be ready to give ſome teſtimonies of his repentance: no wonder if when the rack is before him, this extort confeſſion from him; and if in hopes of a pardon he make many large promiſes of amendment, and freely declare his reſolution of a new and better life. But then it is the hardeſt thing in the world to judg, whether any thing of all this that is done, under ſo great a fear and force, be real. For a ſick man, as he hath loſt his appetite to the moſt pleaſant meats and drinks, ſo likewiſe his ſinful pleaſures and fleſhly luſts are at the ſame time nauſeous to him; and for the very ſame reaſon: For ſickneſs having altered the temper of his body, he hath not at that time any guſt or relliſh for theſe things. And now he is reſolved againſt ſin, juſt as a man that hath no ſtomach is reſolved againſt meat. But if the fit were over, and death would but raiſe his ſiege, and remove his quarters a little farther from him, it is to be feared

feared that his former appetite would soon return to him, and that he would sin with the same eagerness he did before. Besides, how can we expect that God should accept of his repentance at such a time, when we are conscious to our selves, that we did resolve to put off our repentance till we could sin no longer? Can we think it fit for any man to say thus to God in a dying hour; "Lord, now the "world leaves me, I come to thee. I "pray thee give me eternal life, who "could never afford to give thee one good "day of my life: Grant that I may live "with thee, and enjoy thee for ever, who "could never endure to think upon thee. "I must confess that I could never be per-"swaded to leave my sins out of love to "thee, but now I repent of them for fear "of thee: I am conscious to my self that "I would never do any thing for thy sake; "but yet I hope thy goodness is such, that "thou wilt forgive all the ungodliness and "unrighteousness of my life, and accept "of this forced submission which I now "make to thee. I pray thee do not at "last frustrate and disappoint me in this "design which I have laid, of sinning "while I live, and getting to heaven when "I die. Surely no man can think it fit

to ſay thus to God; and yet I am afraid this is the true interpretation of many a mans repentance who hath defer'd it till he comes to die. I do not ſpeak this to diſcourage repentance even at that time. It is always the beſt thing we can do. But I would by all means diſcourage men from putting off ſo neceſſary a work till then. 'Tis true indeed when 'tis come to this, and a ſinner finds himſelf going out of the world, if he have been ſo fooliſh and ſo cruel to himſelf, as to put things upon this laſt hazard, repentance is now the only thing that is left for him to do; this is his laſt remedy, and the only refuge he has to fly to: And this is that which the Miniſter in this caſe ought by all means to put the man upon, and earneſtly to perſwade him to. But when we ſpeak to men in other circumſtances, that are well and in health, we dare not for all the world encourage them to venture their ſouls upon ſuch an uncertainty. For to ſpeak the beſt of it, it is a very dangerous remedy; eſpecially when men have deſignedly contriv'd to rob God of the ſervice of their beſt days, and to put him off with a few unprofitable ſighs and tears at the hour of death. I deſire to have as large apprehenſions of the mercy of God as any man; but withal,

withal, I am very ſure that he is the hardeſt to be impoſed upon of any one in the world. And no man that hath any worthy apprehenſions of the Deity, can imagine him to be ſo eaſie, as to forgive men upon the laſt word and intimation of their minds; and to have ſuch a fondneſs for offenders as would reflect upon the prudence of any Magiſtrate and Governour upon earth. God grant that I may ſincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous life, and may have the comfort of that when I come to die: Aud that I may never be ſo unwiſe as to venture all my hopes of a bleſſed eternity upon a death-bed repentance.

I will conclude all with thoſe excellent ſayings of the Son of *Syrach* (Eccleſ. 5. 6, 7. 16. 11, 12, 18, 21, 22, *Say not, Gods mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my ſins. For mercy and wrath is with him; he is mighty to forgive, and to pour out diſpleaſure: And as his mercy is great, ſo are his corrections alſo. Therefore make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: For ſuddenly ſhall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy ſecurity thou ſhalt be deſtroyed. Humble thy*

self before thou be sick, and in the time of sins shew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be justified.

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1 Cor. III. 15

But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

He Context is thus. *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise Master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon: but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every mans work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it; because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every mans work of what sort it is. If any mans work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any mans work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss; But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

In

In these Words the Apostle speaks of a sort of persons, who held indeed the foundation of *Christianity*, but built upon it such *doctrines* or *practices* as would not bear the *trial*; which he expresses to us by *wood*, *hay*, and *stubble*, which are not *proof* against the *fire*. Such a person, the Apostle tell us, hath brought himself into a very dangerous state, though he would not absolutely deny the possibility of his salvation; *He himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

That by *fire* here, is not meant the fire of *Purgatory*, as some pretend (who would be glad of any shadow of a Text of Scripture to countenance their own dreams) I shall neither trouble you nor my self to manifest; since the *particle* of similitude [ὡς] plainly shews, that the Apostle did not intend an escape out of the fire *literally*, but such an escape as men make out of a house or Town that is on fire. Especially since very learned persons of the Church of *Rome* do acknowledg, that *Purgatory* cannot be concluded from this *Text*; nay, all that × *Estius* contends for from this *place* is, that it cannot be concluded from hence, that there is no *Purgatory*; which we never pretended, but only that this Text does not prove it.

× at verò Estius ad hunc locum ita habet [pœna purgatoria animarum ex hoc Pauli loco bene & solidè colligitur] a particula ista ὡς obstat quo minus verus ignis intelligatur. consuetudo id adverbium frequenter accipi pro licentia, & comparatione. ut Joha. 1, 14. Estius. Vide & Hamond. ad locum Johan:

It is very well known, that this is a Proverbial phrase, used not only in Scripture, but in prophane Authors, to signifie *a narrow escape out of a great danger.* He shall be saved, yet so as by fire, διὰ πυρὸς, *out of the fire.* Just as δι' ὕδατος is used 1 *Pet.* 3. 20. where the Apostle speaking of the eight persons of *Noah's* family, who escap'd the flood, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος, they escaped *out of the water.* So here this phrase is to be rendred in the Text, *he himself shall escape, yet so as out of the fire.* The like expression you have, *Amos* 4. 11, *I have pluckt them as a firebrand out of the fire.* And *Jude* 23, *Others save with fear, plucking them out of the fire.* All which expressions signifie the greatness of the danger, and the difficulty of escaping it; *as one who when his house at midnight is set on fire, and being suddenly wak'd, leaps out of his bed, and runs naked out of the doors, taking nothing that is within along with him, but imploying his whole care to save his body from the flames, as* St. Chrysostome *upon another occasion expresseth it.* And so the *Roman* Orator * (who, it is likely did not think of *Purgatory*) useth this phrase; *Quo ex judicio, velut ex incendio, nudus effugit*; From which Judgment or Sentence

* Tully.

tence he escaped naked, as it were out of a burning. And one of the *Greek* Orators* tells us, That *to save a man out of the fire, was a common proverbial speech.*

* *Aristides*

From the words thus explained, the Observation that naturally ariseth is this, *That men may hold all the Fundamentals of Christian Religion, and yet may superadd other things whereby they may greatly endanger their salvation.* What those things were, which some among the *Corinthians* built upon the foundation of Christianity, whereby they endanger'd their Salvation, we may probably conjecture, by what the Apostle reproves in this Epistle, as the tolerating of *incestuous marriages*, communicating in *Idol-feasts*, &c. And especially by the doctrine of the false Apostles, who at that time did so much disturb the peace of most Christian Churches, and who are so often and so severely reflected upon in this Epistle. And what their *Doctrine* was, we have an account *Act.* 15. *viz.* that they imposed upon the *Gentile* Christians *Circumcision, and the observation of the Jewish Law*, teaching, that *unless they were circumcised, and kept the Law of Moses, they could not be saved.* So that they did not only build these doctrines upon *Christianity*

anity, but they made them equal with the *Foundation*, ſaying, that *unleſs men believed and practiſed ſuch things, they could not be ſaved.*

In ſpeaking to this *Obſervation*, I ſhall reduce my diſcourſe to theſe two Heads,

1. I ſhall preſent to you ſome *Doctrines* and *Practiſes* which have been built upon the *Foundation* of *Chriſtianity*, to the great hazard and danger of mens *ſalvation*. And to be plain, I mean particularly the Church of *Rome*.

2. I ſhall enquire, whether our granting a *poſſibility* of ſalvation (though with great hazard) to thoſe in the communion of the *Roman* Church, and their denying it to us, be a reaſonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himſelf to that Church.

And there is the more reaſon to conſider theſe things, when ſo many *ſeducing Spirits* are ſo active and buſie to pervert men from the *truth*; and when we ſee every day ſo many and their *Religion* ſo eaſily parted. For this reaſon theſe two Conſiderations ſhall be the ſubject of the following diſcourſe.

I. *First*, We will conſider ſome *Doctrines* and *Practices* which the Church of *Rome* hath built upon the *foundation* of

Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens *salvation*. It is not denied by the most judicious *Protestants*, but that the Church of *Rome* do hold all the Articles of the Christian Faith which are necessary to salvation. But that which we charge upon them, as a just ground of our separation from them, is, *the imposing of new Doctrines and Practices upon Christians, as necessary to salvation*, which were never taught by our Saviour, or his Apostles; and which are either directly contrary to the doctrine of Christianity, or too apparently destructive of a good life. and I begin,

1. With their *Doctrines*. And, because I have no mind to aggravate lesser matters, I will single out four or five points of Doctrine, which they have added to the Christian Religion, and which were neither taught by our Saviour and his Apostles, nor own'd in the first ages of Christianity. And the

First which I shall mention, and which being once admitted, makes way for as many errors as they please to bring in, is, their *Doctrine of Infallibility*. And this they are very stiff and peremptory in, though they are not agreed among themselves, where this *Infallibility* is seated

wheth;

whether in *the Pope alone*, or a *Council alone*, or *in both together*, or in *the diffusive body of Christians*. But they are sure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice against it? can any man think, that this *priviledg* was at first conferred upon the Church of *Rome*, and that Christians in all Ages did believe it, and had constant recourse to it, for determining their differences, and yet that that very Church which hath enjoyed and used it so long, should now be at a loss where to find it? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there should be such differences among them, about that which they pretend to be the only means of ending all differences.

There is not the least intimation in Scripture of this *priviledg* confer'd upon the *Roman* Church; nor do the Apostles, in all their Epistles, ever so much as give the least direction to Christians to appeal to the Bishop of *Rome* for a determination of the many differences, which even in those times happen'd among them. And it is strange they should be so silent in this matter, when there were so many *occasions* to speak of it, if our Saviour had

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plainly appointed ſuch an *infallible Judg* of controverſies, for this very end, to decide the differences that ſhould happen among Chriſtians. It is ſtrange, that the *ancient Fathers* in their diſputes with Hereticks, ſhould never appeal to this *Judg*; nay, it is ſtrange they ſhould not conſtantly do it, in all caſes, it being ſo ſhort and expedite a way for the ending of controverſies. And this very conſideration to a wiſe man is inſtead of a thouſand arguments, to ſatisfie him that in thoſe times no ſuch thing was believed in the world.

Now this *Doctrine of infallibility*, if it be not true, is of ſo much the more pernicious conſequence to Chriſtanity, becauſe the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it, in all their other errors; and gives them a pretence of aſſuming an Authority to themſelves to impoſe their own fancies and miſtakes, upon the whole Chriſtian world.

2. Their *Doctrine* about *Repentance*; Which conſiſts in confeſſing their ſins to the Prieſt; which if it be but accompanied with any degree of *contrition*, does upon *abſolution* received from the Prieſt, put them into a ſtate of *ſalvation*, though they have lived the moſt lewd and debauched

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lives that can be imagin'd; than which nothing can be more plainly destructive of a good life. For if this be true, all the hazard that the most wicked man runs of his salvation, is only the danger of so *sudden a death* as gives him no space for confession and absolution. A case that happens so rarely, that any man that is strongly addicted to his lusts, will be content to venture his salvation upon this hazard; and all the arguments to a good life will be very insignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when remission of sins may be had upon such cheap terms.

3. The *Doctrine of Purgatory*; By which they mean a state of temporary punishments after this life, from which men may be released, and translated into Heaven, by the prayers of the living, and the sacrifice of the *Mass*. That this Doctrine was not known in the primitive Church, nor can be proved from Scripture, we have the free acknowledgment of as learned and eminent men as any of that Church; which is to acknowledg that it is a superstructure upon the Christian Religion. And though in one sense, it be indeed a building of *gold* and *silver* upon the foundation of Christianity, considering the vast

revenues which this Doctrine (and that of *Indulgences*, which depends upon it) brings into that Church; yet I doubt not, but in the Apostles sense, it will be found to be *hay* and *stubble*. But how groundless soever it be, it is too gainful a Doctrine to be easily parted withall.

4. The *Doctrine* of *Transubstantiation*. A hard *word*, but I would to God that were the worst of it; the *thing* is much more difficult. I have taken some pains to consider other Religions that have been in the world, and I must freely declare, that I never yet, in any of them, met with any Article or Proposition, imposed upon the belief of men, half so unreasonable and hard to be believed as this is: And yet this, in the *Romish* Church, is esteemed one of the most principal Articles of the Christian Faith; though there is no more certain foundation for it in Scripture, than for our Saviours being Substantially changed into all those things which are said of him, as that he is a *rock*, a *vine*, a *door*, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This Doctrine hath not only *no certain Foundation* in Scripture, but I have a far heavier charge against it, namely, that it undermines the very

very foundation of Christianity it self. And surely nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the *Christian Doctrine*, which destroys the *reason* of our belief of the whole. And that this Doctrine does so, will appear evidently, if we consider what was the main argument which the Apostles used to convince the world of the *truth of Christianity*; and that was this, *That our blessed Saviour, the Author of this Doctrine, wrought such and such miracles, and particularly that he rose again from the dead:* And this they proved, because they were eye-witnesses of his miracles, and had seen him and conversed with him after he was risen from the dead. But what if their senses did deceive them in this matter? then it cannot be denied, but that the main proof of Christianity falls to the ground.

Well! We will now suppose (as the Church of *Rome* does) *Transubstantiation* to have been one principal part of the Christian Doctrine, which the Apostles preached. But if this Doctrine be true, then all mens senses are deceived in a plain sensible matter, wherein 'tis as hard for them to be deceived, as in any thing in the world: For two things can hardly be imagin'd more different, than a *little bit*

of wafer, and the whole *body* of a man.

So that the Apoſtles perſwading men to believe this Doctrine, perſwaded them not to truſt their ſenſes, and yet the argument which they uſed to perſwade them to this was built upon the direct contrary principle, that *mens ſenſes are to be truſted.* For if they be not, then notwithſtanding all the evidence the Apoſtles offer'd for the reſurrection of our Saviour, he might not be riſen; and ſo the faith of Chriſtians was vain. So that they repreſent the Apoſtles as abſurdly as is poſſible, *viz.* going about to perſwade men out of their ſenſes, by virtue of an argument, the whole ſtrength whereof depends upon the certainty of ſenſe.

And now the matter is brought to a fair iſſue, If the teſtimony of *ſenſe* be to be relied upon, then *Tranſubſtantiation* is falſe: If it be not, then no man is ſure that Chriſtianity is true. For the utmoſt aſſurance that the Apoſtles had of the truth of Chriſtianity, was the teſtimony of their own ſenſes concerning our Saviours miracles; and this teſtimony every man hath againſt *Tranſubſtantiation.* From whence it plainly follows, that no man (no not the Apoſtles themſelves) had

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more reaſon to believe *Chriſtianity* to be true, than every man hath to believe *Tranſubſtantiation* to be falſe. And we who did not ſee our Saviours Miracles (as the Apoſtles did) and have only a credible relation of them, but do ſee the *Sacrament*, have leſs evidence of the *truth of Chriſtianity* than of the *falſhood* of *Tranſubſtantiation.*

But cannot God impoſe upon the ſenſes of men, and repreſent things to them otherwiſe than they are? Yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he doth this, are we not to believe him? Moſt certainly. But then we ought to be aſſured that he hath made ſuch a Revelation; which *Aſſurance* no man can have, the certainty of ſenſe being taken away.

I ſhall preſs the buſineſs a little farther, Suppoſing the *Scripture* to be a *Divine Revelation*, and that theſe words (*This is my Body*) if they be in Scripture, muſt neceſſarily be taken in the ſtrict and literal ſenſe; I ask now, What greater evidence any man has, that theſe words (*This is my Body*) are in the Bible, than every man has that the Bread is not chang'd in the Sacrament? Nay no man has ſo much; for we have only the evidence of *one*

ſenſe that theſe words are in the Bible, but that the Bread is not chang'd we have the concurring teſtimony of *ſeveral* of our ſenſes. In a word, if this be once admitted, that the *Senſes* of all men are deceiv'd in one of the moſt plain ſenſible matters that can be, there is no certain means left either to convey or prove a *Divine Revelation* to men; nor is there any way to confute the groſſeſt impoſtures in the World: For if the clear evidence of all mens ſenſes be not ſufficient for this purpoſe, let any man, if he can, find a better and more convincing argument.

5. I will inſtance but in one *Doctrine* more; And that ſhall be, their *Doctrine* of *depoſing Kings* in caſe of Hereſie, and abſolving their Subjects from their Allegiance to them. And this is not a meer *ſpeculative Doctrine*, but hath been put in practice many a time by the Biſhops of *Rome*, as every one knows that is vers'd in Hiſtory. For the troubles and confuſions which were occaſion'd by this very thing, make up a good part of the Hiſtory of ſeveral Ages.

I hope no body expects, that I ſhould take the pains to ſhew, that this was not the Doctrine of our Saviour and his Apoſtles,

poſtles, nor of the Primitive Chriſtians. The *Papiſts* are many of them ſo far from pretending this, that in ſome times and places, when it is not ſeaſonable and for their purpoſe, we have much a-do to perſwade them that ever it was their Doctrine. But if *Tranſubſtantiation* be their Doctrine, *this* is; for they came both out of the ſame Forge, I mean the Council of *Lateran* under Pope *Innocent* the Third. And if (as they tell us) *Tranſubſtantiation* was then eſtabliſh'd, ſo was *this*. And indeed one would think they were Twins, and brought forth at the ſame time, they are ſo like one another, that is, both of them ſo monſtrouſly unreaſonable.

II. I come now in the *ſecond* place, to conſider ſome *Practices* of the Church of *Rome*; which I am afraid will prove as bad as her *Doctrines*. I ſhall inſtance in theſe five.

1. Their celebrating of their Divine ſervice *in an unknown tongue*. And that not only contrary to the practice of the primitive Church, and to the great end and deſign of Religious worſhip, which is the edification of thoſe who are concerned in it, (and it is hard to imagine how men can be edified by what they do

not understand) but likewise in direct contradiction to St. *Paul*, who hath no less than a whole Chapter, wherein he confutes this practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly, as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible. And they that can have the face to maintain that this practice was not condemned by St. *Paul*, or that it was allowed and used in the first Ages of Christianity, need not be ashamed to set up for the defence of any paradox in the World.

2. The Communion *in one kind*. And that notwithstanding, that even by their own acknowledgment, our Saviour instituted it in both kinds, and the primitive Church administred it in both kinds. This I must acknowledg is *no addition* to Christianity, but *a sacrilegious taking away* of an essential part of the Sacrament. For the *Cup* is as essential a part of the institution, as the *Bread*; and they might as well, and by the same authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

3. Their worshipping of *Images*. Which practice (notwithstanding all their distinctions about it, which are no other but what the *Heathens* used in the same case) is as point-blank against the *second*

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Commandment, as a *deliberate* and *malicious killing* of a man is against the *sixth*. But if the case be so plain, a man would think that at least the Teachers and Guides of that Church should be sensible of it. Why, they are so, and afraid the people should be so too; And therefore in their ordinary *Catechisms* and *Manuals* of Devotion, they leave out the *second Commandment*, and divide the *tenth* into two to make up the number; lest if the common people should know it, their Consciences should start at the doing of a thing so directly contrary to the plain command of God.

4. The worshipping of the *bread* and *wine* in the Eucharist, out of a false and groundless perswasion, *that they are substantially changed into the body and blood of Christ*. Which if it be not true (and it hath good fortuine if it be, for certainly it is one of the most incredible things in the whole World) then by the confession of several of their own learned Writers, they are guilty of *gross idolatry*.

5. The worship and invocation of *Saints* and *Angels*; and particularly of the Virgin *Mary*, which hath now for some Ages been a principal part of their Religion. Now a man may justly wonder

that

that ſo conſiderable a part of Religion, as they make this to be, ſhould have no manner of foundation in the Scripture. Does our Saviour any-where ſpeak one word concerning the worſhipping of Her? Nay, does he not take all occaſions to reſtrain all extravagant apprehenſions and imaginations concerning the honour due to Her, as foreſeeing the degeneracy of the Church in this thing? When he was told that his Mother and Brethren were without: *Who* (ſays he) *are my mother and my brethren? He that doth the will of my Father, the ſame is my mother, and ſiſter, and brother.* And when the Woman brake forth into that rapture concerning the bleſſed Mother of our Lord, *Bleſſed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee ſuck!* Our Saviour diverts to another thing, *Yea rather, bleſſed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.* Does either our Saviour or his Apoſtles in all their particular Precepts and directions concerning Prayer, and the manner of it, and by whom we are to addreſs our ſelves to God, give the leaſt intimation of praying to the Virgin *Mary*, or making uſe of her Mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the *practice* of the Church from the be-

beginning, our *Saviour* and his Apoſtles would have been ſo ſilent about ſo conſiderable a part of Religion; Inſomuch that in all the Epiſtles of the Apoſtles I do not remember that her Name is ſo much as once mentioned? And yet the worſhip of her is at this day in the Church of *Rome*, and hath been ſo for ſeveral Ages, a main part of their publick worſhip, yea and of their private devotions too; in which it is uſual with them to ſay *ten Ave Maries* for *one Pater Noſter*; that is, for one Prayer they make to Almighty God, they make ten addreſſes to the bleſſed Virgin; for that is the proportion obſerved in their *Roſaries*. He that conſiders *this*, and had never ſeen the *Bible*, would have been apt to think, that there had been more ſaid concerning *Her* in Scripture, than either concerning *God*, or our bleſſed *Saviour*; and that the New Teſtament were full from one end to the other, of precepts and exhortations to the worſhiping of Her; and yet when all is done, I challenge any man to ſhew me ſo much as one ſentence in the whole Bible that ſounds that way. And there is as little in the Chriſtian Writers of the firſt three hundred years. The truth is, *this practice* began to creep in among

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ſome ſuperſtitious people about the middle of the *fourth century*? And I remember particularly, that *Epiphanius*, who lived about that time, calls it the *Hereſie of the Women*.

And thus I have given you ſome Inſtances of ſeveral *Doctrines* and *Practices*, which the Church of *Rome* have built upon the Foundation of *Chriſtianity*. Much more might have been ſaid of them; but from what hath been ſaid, any man may eaſily diſcern how dangerous they are to the ſalvation of men.

I proceed now in the Second place,

II. To conſider, whether our granting *a poſſibility of ſalvation*, though with great hazard, to thoſe in the Communion of the *Roman* Church, and their denying it to us, be a ſufficient argument and encouragement to any man to quit our Church and go to theirs. And there is the more need to conſider this, becauſe this is the great *popular argument*, wherewith the *emiſſaries* and *agents* of that Church are wont to aſſault our people. *Your Church* (ſay they) *grants that a Papiſt may be ſaved; Ours denies that a Proteſtant can be ſaved: therefore it is ſafeſt to be of our Church, in which ſalvation, by the acknowledgment of both ſides, is poſſible.*

For

For anſwer to this, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that this is ſo far from being a *good argument*, that it is ſo intolerably *weak* and *ſophiſtical*, that any conſiderate man ought to be aſham'd to be catch'd by it. For either it is good of it ſelf, and ſufficient to perſwade a man to relinquiſh our Church, and to paſs over to theirs, without entring into the merits of the cauſe on either ſide, and without comparing the Doctrines and Practiſes of both the Churches together, or it is not. If it be not ſufficient *of it ſelf* to perſwade a man to leave our Church, without comparing the Doctrines on both ſides, then it is to no purpoſe, and there is nothing got by it. For if upon examination and comparing of Doctrines, the one appear to be *true*, and the other *falſe*, this alone is ſufficient inducement to any man to cleave to that Church where the true Doctrine is found; and then there is no need of this argument.

If it be ſaid, that this argument is good in it ſelf, without the examination of the Doctrines of both Churches; this ſeems a very ſtrange thing for any man to affirm, *That it is reaſon enough to a man to be of any Church, whatever her*

her Doctrines and Practices be, if she do but damn those that differ from her, and if the Church that differs from her do but allow a possibility of salvation in her Communion.

But they who use this *argument*, pretend that it is sufficient of it self; and therefore I shall apply my self to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable *weakness* and *insufficiency* of it, to satisfie any mans conscience or prudence to change his Religion. And to this end I shall,

1. Shew the weakness of the *principle* upon which this *argument* relies.

2. Give some *parallel instances* by which it will clearly appear that it concludes false.

3. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it.

4. Shew how unfit it is to work upon those to whom it is propounded. And

5. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

I. I shall shew the *weakness* of the *principle* upon which this *argument* relies; And that is this, *That whatever different parties in Religion agree in, is safest to be chosen.* The true consequence of which *principle*, if it be driven to the head, is, to perswade men to forsake Christianity, and to make them take up in the principles of *natural Religion*, for in these all Religions do agree.

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For if this *principle* be true, and ſignifie any thing, it is dangerous to embrace any thing wherein the ſeveral parties in Religion differ; becauſe that only is ſafe and prudent to be choſen wherein all agree. So that this *argument*, if the foundation of it be good, will perſwade further than thoſe who make uſe of it deſire it ſhould do; for it will not only make men forſake the *Proteſtant Religion*, but *Popery* too; and which is much more conſiderable, *Chriſtianity* it ſelf.

II. I will give ſome *parallel inſtances*, by which it will clearly be ſeen that this *argument* concludes falſe. The *Donatiſts* denied the Baptiſm of the Catholicks to be good, but the *Catholicks* acknowledged the Baptiſm of the *Donatiſts* to be valid. So that both ſides were agreed, that the Baptiſm of the *Donatiſts* was good; therefore the ſafeſt way for St. *Auſtin* and other *Catholicks* (according to this *argument*) was to be Baptized again by the *Donatiſts*, becauſe by the acknowledgment of both ſides, Baptiſm among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the Church of *Rome*. Several in that Church hold *the perſonal Infallibility of the Pope, and the lawfulneſs of depoſing and killing Kings for Hereſie*, to be *de fide*, that is, neceſſary Arti-

cles of Faith, and consequently, that whoever does not believe them, cannot be saved. But a great many *Papists*, though they believe these things to be no matters of Faith, yet they think those that hold them may be saved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now, according to this *argument*, they ought all to be of their opinion in these points, because both sides are agreed, that *they that hold them may be saved*; but one side positively says, that *men cannot be saved if they do not hold them.*

But my Text furnisheth me with as good an instance to this purpose as can be desired. St. *Paul* here in the Text acknowledgeth the *possibility* of the *salvation* of those *who built hay and stubble upon the foundation of Christianity*; *that they might be saved*, though with great difficulty, and, as it were, *out of the fire.* But now among those builders with hay and stubble, there were those who denied the possibility of St. *Paul*'s salvation, and of those who were of his mind. We are told of some who built the *Jewish* Ceremonies and observances upon the foundation of Christianity, and said, that unless men were Circumcised and kept the Law of *Moses*, they could not be saved. So that by this argument St. *Paul* and

and his followers ought to have gone over to those *Judaizing Christians*, because it was acknowledged on both sides that they might be saved. But these *Judaizing Christians* were as uncharitable to St. *Paul* and other Christians, as the Church of *Rome* is now to us; for they said positively, *that they could not be saved.* But can any man think that St. *Paul* would have been moved by this argument, to leave a safe and certain way of salvation, for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The argument, you see, is the very same, and yet it concludes the wrong way; which plainly shews, that it is a *contingent argument*, and concludes uncertainly and by chance, and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

III. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it. I shall mention but these two:

1. According to this *principle*, it is always safest to be on the *uncharitable side*. And yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true Christian, or a true Church, as a man would wish. *Charity* is one of the most essential marks of Christianity; and what the Apostle saith of particular Christians, is as true of whole Churches, that *though they have all Faith*,

yet if they have not Charity, they are nothing.

I grant that no Charity teacheth men to ſee others damned, and not to tell them the danger of their condition. But it is to be conſider'd, that the damning of men is a very hard thing; and therefore whenever we do it, the caſe muſt be wonderfully plain. And is it ſo in this matter? They of the Church of *Rome* cannot deny, but that we embrace all the Doctrines of our Saviour, contain'd in the Apoſtles Creed, and determined by the Four firſt General Councils: And yet they will not allow this, and a good life, to put us within a poſſibility of ſalvation, becauſe we will not ſubmit to all the innovations they would impoſe upon us. And yet I think there is ſcarce any *Doctrine* or *Practice* in difference between them and us, which ſome or other of their moſt learned Writers have not acknowledged, either not to be ſufficiently contained in Scripture, or not to have been held and practiſed by the primitive Church; ſo that nothing can excuſe their uncharitableneſs towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this *argument*; for they do what in them lies, to make themſelves

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no Christians, that they may prove themselves the truer and more Christian Church; A *medium* which we do not desire to make use of.

2. If this *argument* were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world to agree with him in an error, which another does not account damnable, whatever it be, provided he do but damn all those that do not hold it; and there wants nothing but *confidence* and *uncharitableness* to do this. But is there any sence, that another mans boldness and want of charity should be an argument to move me to be of his opinion? I cannot illustrate this better, than by the difference between a skilful Physician and a Mountebank. A *learned* and *skilful Physician* is modest, and speaks *justly* of things: He says, that such a method of cure which he hath directed is safe, and withall, that that which the *Mountebank* prescribes, may possibly do the work, but there is great hazard and danger in it: But the *Mountebank*, who never talks of any thing less then *infallible cures*, (and always the more *Mountebank*, the stronger pretence to *infallibility*), he is *positive* that that method which the *Physician* prescribes will destroy the patient; but his

receipt is infallible, and never fails. Is there any reaſon in this caſe, that this man ſhould carry it, meerly by his *confidence?* And yet if this *argument* be good, the ſafeſt way is to reject the *Phyſicians* advice, and to ſtick to the *Mountebanks.* For both ſides are agreed, that there is a poſſibility of cure in the *Mountebank's* method, but not in the *Phyſician's*; and ſo the whole force of the argument lies in the *confidence* of an *ignorant man.*

IV. This *argument* is very unfit to work upon *thoſe* to whom it is propounded: For either they believe we ſay true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reaſon to be moved by what we ſay. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we ſay in this matter? Namely, that though it be poſſible for ſome in the communion of the *Roman* Church to be ſaved, yet it is very hazardous; and that they are in a ſafe condition already in our Church. And why then ſhould a *bare poſſibility*, accompany'd with infinite and apparent hazard, be an argument to any man to run into that danger?

Laſtly, This *argument* is very improper to be urged by thoſe who make uſe of it. Half of the ſtrength of it lies in this, that we

we *Proteſtants* acknowledg, that *it is poſſible a Papiſt may be ſaved.* But why ſhould they lay any ſtreſs upon this? What matter is it, what we Hereticks ſay, who are ſo damnably miſtaken in all other things? Methinks, if there were no other reaſon, yet becauſe we ſay it, it ſhould ſeem to them to be unlikely to be true. But I perceive, when it ſerves for their purpoſe we have ſome little credit and authority among them.

By this time I hope every one is in ſome meaſure ſatisfied of the *weakneſs of this argument*, which is ſo tranſparent, that no wiſe man can honeſtly uſe it, and he muſt have a very odd underſtanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is a *caſual and contingent argument*, and ſometimes it concludes right, and oftner wrong; and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one caſe, when all things are ſo equal on both ſides, that there is nothing elſe in the whole world to determine him; which ſurely can never happen in matters of Religion neceſſary to be believed. No man is ſo weak, as not to conſider in the change of his Religon, the *merits* of the *cauſe it ſelf*; as not to examine the *Doctrines* and *Practices* of the Churches on bath ſides; as not to take

notice of the *confidence* and *Charity* of both Parties, together with all other things which ought to move a conſcientious and a prudent man: And if upon enquiry there appear to be a clear advantage on either ſide, then this *argument* is needleſs, and comes too late, becauſe the work is already done without it.

Beſides, that the great hazard of ſalvation in the *Roman* Church (which we declare upon account of the *Doctrines* and *Practices* which I have mentioned) ought to deter any man much more from that Religion, than the acknowledged poſſibility of ſalvation in it, ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it: Never did any Chriſtian Church build ſo much *hay* and *ſtubble* upon the *foundation* of Chriſtianity; and therefore *thoſe that are ſaved in it, muſt be ſaved*, as it were, *out of the fire*. And though *Purgatory* be not meant in the Text, yet it is a Doctrine very well ſuted to their manner of building; for there is need of an *ignis purgatorius*, of a *fire* to try their work what it is, and to *burn* up their *hay* and *ſtubble*. And I have ſo much Charity (and I deſire always to have it) as to hope, that a great many among them who live pioufly, and have been almoſt inevitably detain'd in that Church

Church by the prejudice of education and an invincible ignorance, will upon a *general repentance* find mercy with God; and *though their work suffer loss and be burnt*, yet *they themselves may escape, as out of the fire.* But as for those who have had the opportunities of coming to the knowledg of the truth, if they continue in the errors of that Church, or apostatize from the truth, I think their condition so far from being safe, that there must be extraordinary favourable circumstances in their case to give a man hopes of their salvation.

I have now done with the *two* things I propounded to speak to. And I am sorry that the *necessary defence* of our Religion, against the *restless importunities* and *attempts* of our adversaries upon all sorts of persons, hath engaged me to spend so much time in matters of dispute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witnesses, that I have constantly made it my business, in this great Presence and Assembly, to plead against the *impieties* and *wickedness* of men; and have endeavour'd by the best arguments I could think of, to gain men over to a *firm belief* and serious *practice* of the main things of Religion. And, I do assure you, I had much rather perswade

any one to be a good man, than to be of any party or denomination of Christians whatsoever. For I doubt not, but *the belief of the ancient Creed*, provided we entertain nothing that is destructive of it, *together with a good life, will certainly save a man*; and without this no man can have reasonable hopes of salvation, no not in an infallible Church, if there were any such to be found in the world.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent observer of the *genius* and humour of the several Sects and Professions in Religion. And upon the whole matter, I do in my conscience believe the Church of *England* to be the best constituted Church this day in the world; and that, as to the main, the *Doctrine*, and *Government*, and *Worship* of it, are excellently framed to make men *soberly Religious*: Securing men on the one hand, from the wild freaks of *Enthusiasm*; and on the other, from the gross follies of *Superstition*. And our Church hath this peculiar advantage above several Professions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and just subordination to the *civil Authority*, and hath always been untainted in its *loyalty*.

And now shall every trifling considera-

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tion be ſufficient to move a man to relinquiſh ſuch a Church? There is no greater diſparagement to a mans underſtanding no greater argument of a light and ungenerous mind, than raſhly to change ones Religion. *Religion* is our greateſt concernment of all other, and it is not every *little argument*, no nor a great noiſe about *infallibility*, nothing but very *plain* and *convincing evidence*, that ſhould ſway a man in this caſe. But they are utterly inexcuſable, who make a change of ſuch concernment, upon the inſinuations of one ſide only, without ever hearing what can be ſaid for the Church they were baptized and brought up in, before they leave it. They that can yield thus eaſily to the impreſſions of every one that hath a deſign and intereſt to make *Proſelytes*, may at this rate of diſcretion change their *Religion* twice a day, and inſtead of *morning* and *evening Prayer*, they may have a *morning* and an *evening Religion*.

Therefore, for Gods ſake, and for our own Souls ſake, and for the ſake of our Reputation, let us conſider and *ſhew our ſelves men*; Let us not ſuffer our ſelves to be ſhaken and carried away with every wind; Let us not run our ſelves into danger when we may be ſafe. Let us ſtick to the

the *foundation* of *Religion*, the *Articles* of our *common beleif*, and build upon them gold, and ſilver, and precious ſtones, I mean, the *virtues and actions of a good life*; and if we would do this, we ſhould not be apt to ſet ſuch a value upon *hay* and *ſtubble*. If we would ſincerely endeavour to live *holy and vertuous lives*, we ſhould not need to caſt about for a *Religion* which may furniſh us with eaſie and indirect ways to get to Heaven.

I will conclude all with the Apoſtles Exhortation; *Wherefore my beloved Brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*

Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great Shepherd of the ſheep, by the blood of the everlaſting Covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in you that which is well-pleaſing in his ſight, through Jeſus Chriſt, to whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PSAL.

Pſal. CXIX. 156.

Great peace have they that love thy Law, and nothing ſhall offend them.

IN theſe words there are two things contained, The Deſcription of a good man, and the Reward of his goodneſs. 1. The Deſcription of a good man, He is ſaid to be one that *loves the Law* of God, that is, that loves to meditate upon it, and to practiſe it. 2. The Reward of his goodneſs; *Great peace have they that love thy Law.* The word *Peace* is many times uſed in Scripture in a very large ſenſe, ſo as to comprehend all kind of happineſs: ſometimes it ſignifies outward peace and quiet, in oppoſition to war and contention; and ſometimes inward peace and contentment in oppoſition to inward trouble and anguiſh. I underſtand the *Text* chiefly in

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this laſt ſenſe, not wholly excluding either of the other.

My deſign at preſent from theſe words is, to recommend Religion to men from the conſideration of that inward peace and pleaſure which attends it. And ſurely nothing can be ſaid more to the advantage of Religion in the opinion of conſiderate men than this. For the aim of all Philoſophy, and the great ſearch of wiſe men, hath been how to attain peace and tranquillity of mind. And if Religion be able to give this, a greater commendation need not be given to Religion.

But before I enter upon this argument, I ſhal premiſe *two* things by way of Caution:

Firſt. That theſe kind of Obſervations, are not to be taken too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, as if they never failed in any one inſtance. *Ariſtotle* obſerved long ſince, that moral and proverbial ſayings are underſtood to be true generally and for the moſt part; and that is all the truth that is to be expected in them: As, when *Solomon* ſays, *Train up a child in the way wherein he ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*: This is not to be ſo taken, as if no child that is pioufly educated did ever miſcarry afterwards, but that the good education of children is the beſt way to make good men, and commonly approved

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to be ſo by experience. So here, when it is ſaid that *great peace have they that love Gods Law*; the meanning is, that Religion hath generally this effect, though in ſome caſes, and as to ſome perſons, it may be accidentally hindered.

Secondly, When I ſay that Religon gives peace and tranquillity to our minds, this is chiefly to be underſtood of a Religious ſtate, in which a man is well ſettled and confirmed, and not of our firſt entrance into it, for that is more or leſs troubleſome according as we make it. If we begin a religious courſe betimes, before we have contracted any great guilt, and before the habits of ſin be grown ſtrong in us, the work goes on eaſily, without any great conflict or reſiſtance. But the caſe is otherwiſe when a man breaks off from a wicked life, and becomes religious from the direct contrary courſe, in which he hath been long and deeply engaged. In this caſe no man is ſo unreaſonable as to deny, that there is a great deal of ſenſible trouble and difficulty in the making of this change; but when it is once made, peace and comfort will ſpring up by degrees, and daily encreaſe, as we grow more confirmed and eſtabliſhed in a good courſe.

Theſe *two* things being premiſed, I ſhall now endeavour to ſhew, that Religion

gives a man the greateſt pleaſure and ſatisfaction of mind, and that there is no true peace, nor any comparable pleaſure to be had in a contrary courſe. And that from theſe two heads. From *Teſtimony of Scripture*; and from the *Nature of Religion*, which is apt to produce peace and tranquility of mind.

I. *Firſt*, From *Teſtimony of Scripture*. I ſhall ſelect ſome of thoſe *Texts* which are more full and expreſs to this purpoſe, *Job* 22. 21, ſpeaking of God, *Acquaint thy ſelf now with him, and be at peace. To acquaint our ſelves with God*, is a phraſe of the ſame importance with *coming to God*, and *ſeeking of him*, and many other like expreſſions in Scripture, which ſignifie nothing elſe but to become religious, *Pſal.* 37. 38, *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace:* Or, as theſe words are rendred, according to the LXX. in our old Tranſlation, *Keep innocency, take heed to the thing that is right, for that ſhall bring thee peace at the laſt.* Prov. 3. 17, Where *Solomon* ſpeaking of *Wiſdom*, which with him is but another name for *Religion*, ſays, *Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.* Iſa. 32. 17, *The work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.* Matt. 11.28,29, *Come unto me all*

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ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Now *to come to Christ*, is to become his Disciples, to believe and practise his Doctrine; for so our *Saviour* explains himself in the next words; *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest for your souls.* Rom. 2.10, *Glory, and honour, and peace to every man that worketh good.*

And on the contrary; the *Scripture* represents the condition of a sinner to be full of trouble and disquiet. *David* though he was a very good man, yet when he had grievously offended God, the anguish of his mind was such, as even to disorder and distemper his body, *Psal.* 38.2,3,4, *Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore; there is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin; for mine iniquities are gone over mine head, and as an heavy burthen they are too heavy for me.* Isa. 57.20, 21, *The wicked are like the troubled Sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace, saith my God to the wicked.* And *Isa.* 59. 7, 8, *Misery and destruction are in their paths, and the way of peace they know not; they have made themselves crooked paths, whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.* Rom.2.9, *Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil.*

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You ſee how full and expreſs the *Scripture* is in this matter. I come now in the

II. *Second* place, To give you a more particular account of this, from the *Nature of Religion*, which is apt to produce peace and tranquility of mind. And that I ſhall do in theſe three particulars.

1. Religion is apt to remove the chief cauſes of inward trouble and diſquiet.

2. It furniſheth us with all the true cauſes of peace and tranquility of mind.

3. The reflection upon a religious courſe of life, and all the actions of it, doth afterwards yield great pleaſure and ſatisfaction.

First, Religion is apt to remove the chief cauſes af inward trouble and diſquiet. The chief cauſes of inward trouble and diſcontent are theſe *two*, *Doubting* and anxiety of mind, and *Guilt* of Conſcience. Now Religion is apt to free us from both theſe.

1. From *Doubting* and anxiety of mind. Irreligion and Atheiſm makes a man full of doubts and jealouſies whether he be in the right, and whether at laſt things will not prove quite otherwiſe than he hath raſhly determined. For though a man endeavour never ſo much to ſettle himſelf in the principles of Infidelity, and to perſwade his mind that there is no God, and conſequently that there are no rewards to be hoped for, nor puniſhments to be feared

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n another life; yet he can never attain to a ſteddy and unſhaken perſwaſion of theſe things: And however he may pleaſe himſelf with witty reaſons againſt the common belief of mankind, and ſmart reparties to their arguments, and bold and pleaſant raillery about theſe matters; yet I dare ſay, no man ever ſate down in a clear and full ſatisfaction concerning them. For when he hath done all that he can to reaſon himſelf out of Religion, his conſcience ever and anon recoyls upon him, and his natural thoughts and apprehenſions riſe up againſt his reaſonings, and all his wit and ſubtilty is confuted and born down by a ſecret and ſtrong ſuſpicion, which he can by no means get out of his mind, that things may be otherwiſe.

And the reaſon hereof is plain, becauſe all this is an endeavour againſt nature, and thoſe vigorous inſtincts which God hath planted in the minds of men to the contrary. For whenever our minds are free, and not violently hurried away by paſſion, nor blinded by prejudice, they do of themſelves return to their firſt and moſt natural apprehenſions of things. And this is the reaſon why, when the Atheiſt falls into any great calamity, and is awakened to an impartial conſideration of things, by the apprehenſion of Death and judgment, and

 deſpairs

despairs of enjoying any longer those pleasures, for the sake of which he hath all this while rebelled against Religion, his courage presently sinks, and all his arguments fail him, and his case is now too serious to admit of jesting, and at the bottom of his soul he doubts of all that which he asserted with so much confidence, and set so good a face upon before, and can find no ease to his mind, but in retreating from his former principles, nor no hopes of consolation for himself, but in acknowledging that God whom he hath denied, and imploring his mercy whom he hath affronted.

This is always the case of these persons when they come to extremity, not to mention the infinite checks and rebukes, which their own minds give them upon other occasions; so that 'tis very seldom that these men have any tolerable enjoyment of themselves, but are forced to run away from themselves into company, and to stupify themselves by intemperance, that they may not feel the fearful twitches and gripings of their own minds.

Whereas he who entertains the principles of Religion, and therein follows his own natural apprehensions, and the general voice of mankind, and is not conscious to himself, that he knowingly and wilful-

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ly lives contrary to these principles, hath no anxiety in his mind about these things; being verily perswaded they are true, and that he hath all the reason in the world to think so; And if they should prove otherwise (which he hath no cause to suspect) yet he hath this satisfaction, that he hath taken the wisest course, and hath consulted his own present peace and future security, infinitely better than the Atheist hath done, in case he should prove to be mistaken. For it is a fatal mistake to think there is no God, if there be one; but a mistake on the other hand hath no future bad consequences depending upon it; nor indeed any great present inconvenience, Religion only restraining a man from doing some things, from most of which it is good he should be restrained however: so that at the worst, the religious man is only mistaken, but the Atheist is miserable if he be mistaken: *miserable* beyond all imagination, and past all remedy.

2. Another, and indeed a principal cause of trouble and discontent to the minds of men is *Guilt*. Now Guilt is a consciousness to our selves that we have done amiss; and the very thought that we have done amiss is apt to lie very cross in our minds, and to cause great anguish and confusion Besides that Guilt is always attended with

Fear, which naturally ſprings up in the mind of man from a ſecret apprehenſion of the miſchief and inconvenience that his ſin will bring upon him, and of the vengeance that hangs over him from God, and will overtake him either in this world, or in the other.

And though the ſinner, while he is in full health and proſperity, may make a ſhift to divert and ſhake off theſe Fears; yet they frequently return upon him, and upon every little noiſe of danger, upon the apprehenſion of any calamity that comes near him, his guilty mind is preſently jealous that it is making towards him, and is particularly levelled againſt him. For he is ſenſible that there is a juſt power above him, to whoſe indignation he is continually liable, and therefore he is always in fear of him; and how long ſoever he may have ſcaped puniſhment in this world, he cannot but dread the vengeanee of the other; And theſe thoughts are a continual diſturbance to his mind, and *in the midſt of laughter make his heart heavy*; And the longer he continues in a wicked courſe, the more he multiplies the grounds and cauſes of his fears.

But now Religion frees a man from all this torment, either by preventing the cauſe of it, or directing to the cure; either by

by preſerving us from guilt, or clearing us of it in caſe we have contracted it. It preſerves us from guilt by keeping us innocent; and in caſe we have offended, it clears us of it, by leading us to repentance and the amendment of our lives; which is the onely way to recover the favour of God, and the peace of our own conſciences, and to ſecure us againſt all apprehenſion of danger from the divine Juſtice; though not abſolutely from all fear of puniſhment in this world, yet from that which is the great danger of all, the condemnation and torment of the world to come. And by this means a man's mind is ſetled in perfect peace, Religion freeing him from thoſe tormenting fears of the Divine diſpleaſure, which he can upon no other terms rid himſelf of; whereas the ſinner is always ſowing the ſeeds of trouble in his own mind, and laying a foundation of continual diſcontent to himſelf.

Secondly, As Religion removes the chief grounds of trouble and diſquiet, ſo it *miniſters to us all the true cauſes of peace and tranquillity of mind.* Whoever lives according to the rules of Religion, lays theſe three great foundations of peace and comfort to himſelf.

1. He is ſatisfied that in being religious he doth that which is moſt reaſonable.

2. That he ſecures himſelf againſt the greateſt miſchiefs and dangers, by making God his Friend.

3. That upon the whole matter he do's in all reſpects moſt effectually conſult and promote his own intereſt and happineſs.

1. He is ſatisfied that he does that which is moſt reaſonable. And it is no ſmall pleaſure to be juſtified to our ſelves, to be ſatisfied that we are what we ought to do, and do what in reaſon we ought to be, that which beſt becomes us, and which according to the primitive intention of our Being is moſt natural, for whatever is natural is pleaſant. Now the practice of piety towards God, and of every other grace and virtue which Religion teacheth us, are things reaſonable in themſelves, and what God when he made us, intended we ſhould do. And a man is then pleaſed with himſelf, and his own actions, when he doth what he is convinced he ought to do; and is then offended with himſelf, when he goes againſt the light of his own mind, by neglecting his duty, or doing contrary to it; for then his conſcience checks him, and there is ſomething within him that is uneaſie, and puts him into diſorder. As when a man eats or drinks any thing that is unwholſom, it offends his ſtomach, and puts his body into an unnatural and a reſtleſs ſtate.

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For every thing is then at reſt and peace, when it is in that ſtate in which Nature intended it to be; and being violently forced out of it, it is never quiet till it recover it again. Now Religion and the practice of its virtues, is the natural ſtate of the ſoul, the condition to which God deſigned it. As God made man a Reaſonable creature, ſo all the acts of Religion are reaſonable and ſuitable to our nature: And our ſouls are then in health, when we are what the Laws of Religion require us to be, and do what they command us to do. And as we find an unexpreſſible eaſe and pleaſure when our body is in its perfect ſtate of health, and on the contrary every diſtemper cauſeth pain and uneaſineſs; ſo is it with the ſoul. When Religion governs all our inclinations and actions, and the temper of our minds, and the courſe of our lives is conformable to the precepts of it, all is at peace. But when we are otherwiſe, and live in any vitious practice, how can there be peace, ſo long as we act unreaſonably, and do thoſe things whereby we neceſſarily create trouble and diſturbance to our ſelves? How can we hope to be at eaſe, ſo long as we are in a ſick and diſeaſed condition? Till the corruption that is in us be wrought out, our ſpirits will be in a perpetual tumult and fer-

mentation; and it is as impossible for us to enjoy the peace and serenity of our minds, as it is for a sick man to be at ease: He may use what arts of diversion he will, and change from one place and posture to another: but still he is restless, because there is that within him which gives him pain and disturbance. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* Such men may dissemble their condition, and put on the face and appearance of pleasantness and contentment; but God, who sees all the secrets of mens hearts, knows it is far otherwise with them. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

2. Another ground of peace which the religious man hath, is, That he hath made God his Friend. Now Friendship is peace and pleasure both; It is natural love, and that is a double pleasure; And it is hard to say which is the greatest, the pleasure of loving God, or of knowing that he loves us. Now whoever sincerely endeavours to please God, may rest perfectly assured that God hath no displeasure against him; for
Ps. 11, 7. *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance shall behold the upright*; that is, he will be favourable to such persons. As
5, 5. *he hates the workers of iniquity*, so *he takes*
147, 11. *pleasure in them that fear him, in such as keep*
103, 18. *his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.* And

And being assured of his favour, we are secured against the greatest dangers and the greatest fears; and may say with *David, Return then unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee:* Ps. 116, 7. *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear; The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* Ps. 27, 1. What can reasonably trouble or discontent that man who hath made his peace with God, and is restored to his favour, who is the best and most powerful friend, and can be the sorest and most dangerous enemy in the whole World?

3. By being religious we do most effectually consult our own interest and happiness. A great part of Religion consists in moderating our appetites and passions, and this naturally tends to the composure of our minds. He that lives piously and virtuously, acts according to Reason, and in so doing maintains the present peace of his own mind; and not only so, but he lays the foundation of his future happiness to all Eternity. For Religion gives a man the hopes of eternal life: And all pleasure does not consist in present enjoyment; there is a mighty pleasure also, in the firm belief and expectation of a future good; and if it be a great and a lasting good, it will support a man under a

great

great many present evils. If Religion be certainly the way to avoid the greatest evils, and to bring us to happiness at last, we may contentedly bear a great many afflictions for its sake. For though all suffering be grievous, yet it is pleasant to escape great dangers, and to come to the possession of a mighty good, though it be with great difficulty and inconvenience to our selves. And when we come to heaven (if ever we be so happy as to get thither) it will be a new and a greater pleasure to us, to remember the pains and troubles whereby we were saved and made happy.

So that all these, put together, are a firm foundation of peace and comfort to a good man. There is a great satisfaction in the very doing of our duty, and acting reasonably, though there may happen to be some present trouble and inconvenience in it. But when we do not only satisfie our selves in so doing, but likewise please him whose favour is better than life, and whose frowns are more terrible than death; when in doing our duty we directly promote our own happiness, and in serving God do most effectually serve our own interest, what can be imagined to minister more peace and pleasure to the mind of man?

This is the *second thing*. Religion furnisheth us with all the true causes of

of peace and tranquility of mind.

Thirdly, The Reflection upon a religious and virtuous course of life doth afterwards yield a mighty pleasure and satisfaction. And what can commend Religion more to us, than that the remembrance of any pious and virtuous action gives us so much contentment and delight? So that whatever difficulty and reluctancy we may find in the doing of it, to be sure, there is peace and satisfaction in the looking back upon it. No man ever reflected upon himself with regret for having done his duty to God or man; for having lived soberly, or righteously, or godly in this present world. Nay, on the contrary, the conscience of any duty faithfully discharged, the memory of any good we have done, does refresh the soul with a strange kind of pleasure and joy. *Our rejoycing is this* (saith St. *Paul*) *the testimony of our consciences, that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*

But, on the other side, the course of a vicious life, all acts of impiety to God, of malice and injustice to men, of intemperance and excess in reference to our selves, do certainly leave a sting behind them. And what ever pleasure there may be in the present act of them, the memory of them is so tormenting, that men are glad to use all the

the arts of diverſion to fence off the thoughts of them. One of the greateſt troubles in the world to a bad man is to look into himſelf, and to remember how he hath lived. I appeal to the conſciences of men whether this be not true.

And is not here now a mighty difference between theſe two courſes of life; that when we do any thing that is good, if there be any trouble in it, it is ſoon over, but the pleaſure of it is perpetual: when we do a wicked action, the pleaſure of it is ſhort and tranſient, but the trouble and ſting of it remains for ever? The reflection upon the good we have done, gives a laſting ſatisfaction to our minds, but the remembrance of any evil committed by us, leaves a perpetual diſcontent.

And, which is yet more conſiderable, a religious and virtuous courſe of life does then yeild moſt peace and comfort, when we moſt ſtand in need of it; in times of affliction, and at the hour of death. When a man falls into any great calamity, there is no comfort in the world like to that of a good conſcience: This makes all calm and ſerene within, when there is nothing but clouds and darkneſs about him. So *David* obſerves of the good man, *Pſal.* 112.4, *Unto the upright there ariſeth light in darkneſs.* All the pious and virtuous actions that we do,

do, are ſo many ſeeds of peace and comfort, ſown in our conſciences, which will ſpring up and flouriſh moſt in times of outward trouble and diſtreſs. *Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart.* And, at the hour of death, *The righteous hath hopes in his death*, ſaith *Solomon*. And what a ſeaſonable refreſhment is it to the mind of man, when the pangs of death are ready to take hold of him, and he is juſt ſtepping into the other world, to be able to look back with ſatisfaction upon a religious and well-ſpent life? Then, if ever, the comforts of a good man do overflow, and a kind of heaven ſprings up in his mind, and he rejoyceth in the hopes of the glory of God. And that is a true and ſolid comfort indeed, which will ſtand by us in the day of adverſity, and ſtick cloſe to us when we have moſt need of it.

But with the ungodly it is not ſo: His guilt lies in wait for him, eſpecially againſt ſuch times, and is never more fierce and raging than in the day of diſtreſs, ſo that according as his troubles without are multiplyed, ſo are his ſtings within. And ſurely affliction is then grievous indeed, when it falls upon a galled and uneaſie mind. Were it not for this, outward afflictions might be tolerable; the *ſpirit of*

a man

a man might bear his infirmities, but a wounded ſpirit who can bear? But eſpecially at the hour of death. How does the guilt of his wicked life then ſtare him in the face? What ſtorms and tempeſts are raiſed in his ſoul? which make it like the troubled ſea when it cannot reſt. When Eternity, that fearful and amazing ſight preſents it ſelf to his mind, and he feels himſelf ſinking into the regions of darkneſs, and is every moment in a fearful expectation of meeting with the juſt reward of his deeds; with what regret does he then remember the ſins of his life? and how full of rage and indignation is he againſt himſelf for having neglected to know when he had ſo many opportunities of knowing them, the things that belonged to his peace; and which, becauſe he hath neglected them, are now, and likely to be for ever, hid from his eyes?

And if this be the true caſe of the righteous and wicked man, I need not multiply words, but may leave it to any mans thoughts, in which of theſe conditions he would be. And ſurely the difference between them is ſo very plain, that there can be no difficulty in the choice.

But now, though this diſcourſe be very true, yet for the full clearing of this matter, it will be but fair to conſider what

may

may be ſaid on the other ſide; And the rather, becauſe there are ſeveral objections which ſeem to be countenanced from experience, which is enough to overthrow the moſt plauſible ſpeculation. As,

1. That wicked men ſeem to have a great deal of pleaſure and contentment in their vices.

2. That Religion impoſeth many harſh and grievous things, which ſeem to be inconſiſtent with that pleaſure and ſatisfaction I have ſpoken of.

3. That thoſe who are religious, are many times very diſconſolate and full of trouble.

To the *firſt*, I deny not that wicked men have ſome pleaſure in their vices; but when all things are rightly computed, and juſt abatements made, it will amount to very little. For it is the loweſt and meaneſt kind of pleaſure, it is chiefly the pleaſure of our bodies and our ſenſes, of our worſt part; the pleaſure of the beaſt, and not of the man; that which leaſt becomes us, and which we were leaſt of all made for. Thoſe ſenſual pleaſures which are lawful, are much inferiour to the leaſt ſatisfaction of the mind; and when they are unlawful, they are always inconſiſtent with it. And *what is a man profited*, if to gain a little ſenſual pleaſure, he loſe the

the peace of his ſoul? Can we find in our hearts to call that pleaſure, which robs us of a far greater and higher ſatisfaction than it brings? The delights of ſenſe are ſo far from being the chief pleaſure for which God deſigned us, that, on the contrary, he intended we ſhould take our chief pleaſure in the reſtraining and moderating of our ſenſual appetites and deſires, and in keeping them within the bounds of Reaſon and Religion.

And then, It is not a laſting pleaſure. Thoſe fits of mirth which wicked men have, how ſoon are they over? Like a ſudden blaze, which after a little flaſh and noiſe is preſently gone. It is the compariſon of a very great and experienced man in theſe matters, *Like the crackling of thorns under a pot* (ſaith *Solomon*), *ſo is the laughter of the fool*, that is, the mirth of the wicked man; it may be loud, but it laſts not.

Eccl. 7, 6

But, which is moſt conſiderable of all, the pleaſures of ſin bear no proportion to that long and black train of miſeries and inconveniences which they draw after them. Many times, poverty and reproach, pains and diſeaſes upon our bodies, *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil.* So that if theſe pleaſures were greater than

they are, a man had better be without them, than purchaſe them at ſuch dear rates.

To the *ſecond*. That Religion impoſeth many harſh and grievous things, which ſeem to be inconſiſtent with that pleaſure and ſatisfaction I have ſpoken of: As, the bearing of perſecution, repentance and mortification, faſting and abſtinence, and many other rigours and ſeverities. As to perſecution; This Diſcourſe doth not pretend that Religion exempts men from outward troubles, but that, when they happen, it ſupports men under them better than any thing elſe. As for Repentance and mortification; this chiefly concerns our firſt entrance into Religion, after a wicked life, which I acknowledged, in the beginning of this diſcourſe, to be very grievous: But this doth not hinder, but that though Religion may be troubleſome at firſt to ſome perſons, whoſe former ſins and crimes have made it ſo, it may be pleaſant afterwards when we are accuſtomed to it. And whatever the trouble of repentance be, it is unavoidable, unleſs we reſolve to be miſerable; for *except we repent we muſt periſh*. Now there is always a rational ſatisfaction in ſubmitting to a leſs inconvenience to remedy and prevent a greater. As for Faſt-

ing and abſtinence, which is many times very helpful and ſubſervient to the ends of Religion, there is no ſuch extraordinary trouble in it, if it be diſcreetly managed, as is worth the ſpeaking of. And as for other rigours and ſeverities, which ſome pretend Religion does impoſe, I have only this to ſay, that if men will play the fool, and make Religion more troubleſome than God hath made it, I cannot help that: And, that this is a falſe repreſentation of religion, which ſome in the world have made, as if it did chiefly conſiſt not in pleaſing God, but in diſpleaſing and tormenting our ſelves. This is not to paint Religion like her ſelf, but rather like one of the *Furies*, with nothing but whips and ſnakes about her.

To the *third*. That thoſe who are religious are many times very diſconſolate and full of trouble. This, I confeſs, is a great Objection indeed, if Religion were the cauſe of this trouble; but there are other plain cauſes of it, to which Religion, rightly underſtood, is not acceſſary. As, falſe and miſtaken principles in Religion. The imperfection of our Religion and obedience to God. And a melancholly temper and diſpoſition. *Falſe and miſtaken principles in Religion.* As this for one; That God does not ſincerely

desire

desire the salvation of men, but hath from all eternity effectually barr'd the greatest part of mankind from all possibility of attaining that happiness which he offers to them; and every one hath cause to fear that he may be in that number. This were a melancholly consideration indeed, if it were true; but there is no ground either from Reason or Scripture to entertain any such thought of God. Our *destruction is of our selves*; and no man shall be ruined by any decree of God, who does not ruin himself by his own fault.

Or else, *the imperfection of our Religion and obedience to God.* Some, perhaps, are very devout in serving God, but not so kind and charitable, so just and honest in their dealings with men. No wonder if such persons be disquieted; the natural consciences of men being not more apt to disquiet them for anything, than for the neglect of those moral duties, which natural light teacheth them. Peace of conscience is the effect of an impartial and universal obedience to the laws of God; and I hope no man will blame Religion for that which plainly proceeds from the want of Religion.

Or lastly. *A melancholly temper and disposition*; which is not from Religion, but from our nature and constitution, and

therefore Religion ought not to be charged with it.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and plainly as I could, to represent to you what peace and pleasure, what comfort and satisfaction, Religion, rightly understood and sincerely practised, is apt to bring to the minds of men. And I do not know by what sort of Argument Religion can be more effectually recommended to wise and considerate men. For in perswading men to be religious, I do not go about to rob them of any true pleasure and contentment, but to direct them to the very best, nay indeed the onely way of attaining and securing it.

I speak this in great pity and compassion to those who make it their great design to please themselves, but do grievously mistake the way to it. The direct way is that which I have set before you, a holy and virtuous life, *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world. A good man* (saith *Solomon*) *is satisfied from himself:* He hath the pleasure of being wise, and acting reasonably; the pleasure of being justified to himself in what he doth, and of being acquitted by the sentence of his own mind. There is a great pleasure in being innocent, because that

that prevents guilt and trouble; It is pleasant to be virtuous and good, because that is to excel many others; and it is pleasant to grow better, because that is to excel our selves: Nay, it is pleasant even to mortifie and subdue our lusts, because that is Victory: It is pleasant to command our appetites and passions, and to keep them in due order, within the bounds of Reason and Religion, because this is a kind of Empire, this is to govern. It is naturally pleasant to rule and have power over others; but he is the great and the absolute Prince who commands himself. This is *the Kingdom of God within us*, a dominion infinitely to be preferred before all *the Kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them* It is *the Kingdom of God*, described by the *Apostle*, which consists *in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.* In a word; The pleasure of being good and of doing good, is the chief happiness of God himself.

But now the wicked man deprives himself of all this pleasure, and creates perpetual discontent to his own mind. O the torments af a guilty conscience! which the sinner feels more or less all his life long. But, alas, thou dost not yet know the worst of it, no not in this World.

What wilt thou do when thou comest to die? What comfort wilt thou then be able to give thy self? or what comfort can any one else give thee? when thy conscience is miserably rent and torn, by those waking furies, which will then rage in thy breast, and thou knowest not which way to turn thy self for ease; then, perhaps at last, the Priest is unwillingly sent for, to patch up thy conscience as well as he can, and to appease the crys of it; and to force himself out of very pity and good nature, *to say, peace, peace, when there is no peace.* But alas man! what can we do? what comfort can we give thee, when thine iniquities testifie against thee to thy very face? *How can there be peace,* when thy lusts and debaucheries, thy impieties to God and thy injuries to men, have been so many? *How can there be peace* when thy whole life hath been a continued contempt and provocation of Almighty God, and a perpetual violence and affront to the light and reason of thy own mind?

Therefore what ever temptation there may be in sin at a distance, whatever pleasure in the act and commission of it, yet remember that it always goes off with trouble, and *will be bitterness in the end.* Those words of *Solomon* have a terrible

ſting in the concluſion of them, *Rejoyce O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes; but know, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.* Eccles. 11, 9.

This one thought which will very often unavoidably break into our minds (that *God will bring us into judgment*) is enough to daſh all our contentment, and to ſpoil all the pleaſure of a ſinful life. Never expect to be quiet in thine own mind, and to have the true enjoyment of thy ſelf, till thou liveſt a virtuous and religious life.

And if this diſcourſe be true (as I am confident I have every mans conſcience on my ſide) I ſay, if this be true, let us venture to be wiſe and happy, that is, to be Religious. Let us reſolve to *break off our ſins by repentance*, to *fear God and keep his Commandments*, as ever we deſire to avoid the unſpeakable torments of a guilty mind, and would not be perpetually uneaſie to our ſelves.

Grant we beſeech thee, Almighty God, that we may every one of us know and do in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.

And the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make us perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in us always that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

A SER-

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SERMON

Preached before the

KING.

PSAL. CXIX. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

THE two great causes of the ruin of men, are *Infidelity* and *want of consideration*. Some do not believe the principles of Religion, or at least have by arguing against them rendered them so doubtful to themselves, as to take away the force and efficacy of them: But these are but a very

very ſmall part of mankind, in compariſon of thoſe who periſh for want of conſidering theſe things. For moſt men take the principles of Religion for granted, *That there is a God*, and a *Providence*, and a *State of Rewards and Puniſhments after this life*, and never entertained any conſiderable doubt in their minds to the contrary: But for all this, they never attended to the proper and natural conſequences of theſe principles, nor applyed them to their own caſe; They never ſeriouſly conſidered the notorious inconſiſtency of their lives with this belief, and what manner of perſons they ought to be who are verily perſwaded of the truth of theſe things.

For no man that is convinced that there is a God, and conſiders the neceſſary and immediate conſequences of ſuch a perſwaſion, can think it ſafe to affront him by a wicked life: No man that believes the infinite happineſs and miſery of another world, and conſiders withall that one of theſe ſhall crrtainly be his portion, according as he demeans himſelf in this preſent life, can think it indifferent what courſe he takes. Men may thruſt away theſe thoughts, and keep them out of their minds for a long time; but no man that enters into the ſerious conſideration

ſideration of theſe matters, can poſſibly think it a thing indifferent to him whether he be happy or miſerable for ever.

So that a great part of the evils of mens lives would be cured, if they would but once lay them to heart; would they but ſeriouſly conſider the conſequences of a wicked life, they would ſee ſo plain reaſon, and ſo urgent a neceſſity for the reforming of it, that they would not venture to continue any longer in it. This courſe *David* took here in the Text, and he found the happy ſucceſs of it; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.*

In which Words there are theſe two things conſiderable.

I. The courſe which *David* here took for the reforming of his life; *I thought on my ways.*

II. The ſucceſs of this courſe. It produced actual and ſpeedy reformation; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies; I made haſte and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

Theſe are the two heads of my following diſcourſe; which when I have ſpoken to, I ſhall endeavour to perſwade

ſwade my ſelf and you to take the ſame courſe which *David* here did, and God grant that it may have the ſame effect.

I. We will conſider *the courſe which* David *here took* for the reforming of his life; *I thought on my ways*, or, as the words are rendered in our old Tranſlation, *I called my own ways to remembrance.* And this may either ſignifie a general ſurvey and examination of his life, reſpecting indifferently the good or bad actions of it: Or elſe, which is more probable, it may ſpecially refer to the ſins and miſcarriages of his life; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I called my ſins to remembrance. Neither of theſe ſenſes can be much amiſs in order to the effect mentioned in the Text, *viz.* the reformation and amendment of our lives; and therefore neither of them can reaſonably be excluded, though I ſhall principally inſiſt upon the latter.

1. This *thinking on our ways* may ſignifie a general ſurvey and examination of our lives, reſpecting indifferently our good and bad actions. For *Way* is a Metaphorical word, denoting the courſe of a mans life and actions. *I thought on my ways*, that is, I examined my life, and called my

my ſelf to a ſtrict account for the actions of it; I compared them with the Law of God, the rule and meaſure of my duty, and conſidered how far I had obeyed that Law, or offended againſt it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in compariſon of what I might and ought to have done: That by this means I might come to underſtand the true ſtate and condition of my ſoul, and diſcerning how many and great my faults and defects were, I might amend whatever was amiſs, and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it muſt needs be a thing of excellent uſe, for men to ſet a part ſome particular times for the examination of themſelves, that they may know how accounts ſtand between God and them. *Pythagoras* (or whoever were the Author of thoſe *golden verſes* which paſs under his name) doth eſpecially recommend this practiſe to his Scholars, every night before they ſlept, to call themſelves to account for the actions of the day paſt; enquiring wherein they had tranſgreſſed, what good they had done that day, or omitted to do. And this no doubt is an admirable means to improve men in vertue, a moſt effectual way to keep our conſciences continually waking and tender, and to make us ſtand in

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awe of our ſelves, and afraid to ſin, when we know before-hand that we muſt give ſo ſevere an account to our ſelves of every action.

And certainly it is a great piece of wiſdom to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may in ſome meaſure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives, and that we may not be oppreſſed and confounded by the inſupportable weight of the ſins of a whole life falling upon us at once; and that perhaps at the very worſt time, when we are ſick and weak, and have neither underſtanding nor leiſure to recollect our ſelves, and to call our ſins diſtinctly to remembrance, much leſs to exerciſe any fit and proper acts of repentenc for them. For there is nothing to be done in Religion when our Reaſon is once departed from us; then darkneſs hath overtaken us indeed, and *the night is come when no man can work.* But though we were never ſo ſenſible, and ſhould do all we can at that time, yet after all this, how it will go with us, God alone knows. I am ſure it is too much preſumption for any man to be confident that one general and confuſed act of repentance will ſerve his turn for the ſins of his whole life. Therefore there is great reaſon why we ſhould often

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examine our ſelves, both in order to the amendment of our lives, and the eaſe of our conſciences when we come to dye.

2. This *thinking of our ways* may particularly and ſpecially refer to the ſins and miſcarriages of our lives: *I thought on my ways*, that is, I called my ſins to remembrance; I took a particular account of the errors of my life, and laid them ſeriouſly to heart; I conſidered all the circumſtances and conſequences of them, and all other things belonging to them; and reaſoning the matter throughly with my ſelf, came to a peremptory and fixed reſolution of breaking off this wicked courſe of life, and betaking my ſelf to the obedience of God's Laws. And the *conſideration of our ways* taken in this ſenſe (which ſeems to be the more probable meaning of the words) may reaſonably imply in it theſe following particulars.

1. The taking of a particular account of our ſins, together with the ſeveral circumſtances and aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and ſorrow for them; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I laid them ſadly to heart.

3. A ſerious conſideration of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of a ſinful courſe.

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4. A due ſenſe of the fearful and fatal conſequences of a wicked life.

5. A full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this courſe.

6. An apprehenſion of the poſſibility of doing this.

1. *The taking of a particular account of our ſins, together with the ſeveral circumſtances and aggravations of them.* And to this end, we may do well to reflect particularly upon the ſeveral ſtages and periods of our lives, and to recollect at leaſt the principal miſcarriages belonging to each of them. And the better to enable us hereto, it will be uſeful to have before our eyes ſome abridgement or ſummary of the Laws of God, containing the chief heads of our duties and ſins, of vertues and vices; For this will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, which otherwiſe perhaps would have been forgotten by us. We ſhould likewiſe conſider the ſeveral relations wherein we have ſtood to others, and how far we have tranſgreſſed or failed of our duty in any of theſe reſpects.

And having thus far made up our ſad account, we may in a great meaſure underſtand the number and greatneſs of our ſins; abating for ſome particulars which are ſlipp'd out of our memory, and for

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ſins of ignorance, and dayly infirmities, which are innumerable. By all which we may ſee, what vile wretches and grievous offenders we have been: eſpecially if we take into conſideration the ſeveral heavy circumſtances of our ſins, which do above meaſure aggravate them; the heinouſneſs of many of them, as to their nature, and the injurious conſequences of them to the perſon, or eſtate, or reputation of our neighbour; their having been committed againſt the clear knowledg of our duty, againſt the frequent checks and convictions of our conſciences, telling us when we did them that we did amiſs; againſt ſo many motions and ſuggeſtions of Gods Holy Spirit, ſo many admonitions and reproofs from others; and contrary to our own moſt ſerious vows and reſolutions, renewed at ſeveral times, eſpecially upon the receiving of the bleſſed Sacrament, and in times of ſickneſs and diſtreſs: and all this notwithſtanding the plaineſt declarations of Gods will to the contrary, notwithſtanding the terrors of the Lord, and the wrath of God revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men; notwithſtanding the cruel ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſins; and the moſt merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood: Add to

this the ſcandal of our wicked lives to our holy Religion, the ill example of them to the corrupting and debauching of others, the affront of them to the Divine Authority, and the horrible ingratitude of them to the mercy and goodneſs and patience of God, to which we have ſuch infinite obligations. Thus we ſhould ſet our ſins in order before our eyes, with the ſeveral aggravations of them.

2. A hearty *trouble* and *ſorrow* for ſin; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I laid my ſins ſadly to heart. And ſurely whenever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be inwardly touched and ſenſibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but hang down our heads, and ſmite upon our breaſts, and be in pain and heavineſs at our very hearts. I know that the tempers of men are very different, and therefore I do not ſay that tears are abſolutely neceſſary to repentance, but they do very well become it; and a thorough ſenſe of ſin will almoſt melt the moſt hard and obdurate diſpoſition, and fetch water out of a very rock. To be ſure the conſideration of our ways ſhould cauſe inward trouble and confuſion in our minds. The leaſt we can do when we have done amiſs, is to be ſorry for it, to condemn

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our own folly, and to be full of indignation and displeasure against our selves for what we have done, and to resolve never to do the like again. And let us make sure that our trouble and sorrow for sin have this effect, *to make us leave our sins*; and then we shall need to be the less solicitous about the degrees and outward expressions of it.

3. *A serious consideration of the evil and unreasonableness of a sinful course.* That sin is the stain and blemish of our natures, the reproach of our reason and understanding, the disease and the deformity of our souls, the great enemy of our peace, the cause of all our fears and troubles: That whenever we do a wicked action, we go contrary to the clearest dictates of our reason and conscience, to our plain and true interest, and to the strongest tyes and obligations of duty and gratitude. And which renders it yet more unreasonable, sin is a voluntary evil which men wilfully bring upon themselves. Other evils may be forced upon us, whether we will or no; a man may be poor or sick by misfortune, but no man is wicked and vitious but by his own choice. How do we betray our folly and weakness, by suffering our selves to be hurried away by every foolish lust and passion, to do things which we know

to be prejudicial and hurtful to our ſelves; and ſo baſe and unworthy in themſelves, that we are aſhamed to do them, not only in the preſence of a wiſe man, but even of a child or a fool. So that if ſin were followed with no other puniſhment, beſides the guilt of having done a ſhameful thing, a man would not by intemperance make himſelf a fool and a beaſt; one would not be falſe and unjuſt, treacherous or unthankful, if for no other reaſon, yet out of meer greatneſs and generoſity of mind, out of reſpect to the dignity of his nature, and out of very reverence to his own reaſon and underſtanding. For let Witty men ſay what they will in defence of their vices, there are ſo many natural acknowledgments of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of ſin, that the matter is paſt all denial: Men are generally galled and uneaſie at the thoughts of an evil action, both before and after they have commited it; they are aſhamed to be taken in a crime, and heartily vexed and provoked whenever they are upbraided with it; and 'tis very obſervable, that though the greater part of the world was always bad, and vice hath ever had more ſervants and followers to cry it up, yet never was there any Age ſo degenerate, in which Vice could get the better of Vertue in point of genera

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esteem and reputation: Even they whose wills have been most enslaved to sin, could never yet so far bribe and corrupt their understandings, as to make them give full approbation to it.

4. *A due sense of the fearful and fatal consequences of a wicked life.* And these are so sad and dreadful, and the danger of them so evident, and so perpetually threatning us, that no temptation can be sufficient to excuse a man to himself and his own reason for venturing upon them. A principal point of wisdom is to look to the End of things; not only to consider the present pleasure and advantage of any thing, but also the ill consequences of it for the future; and to ballance them one against the other.

Now sin in its own nature tends to make men miserable. It certainly causes trouble and disquiet of mind: And to a considerate man, that knows how to value the ease and satisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater argument against sin, than to consider that the forsaking of it is the only way to find rest to our souls.

Besides this, every vice is naturally attended with some particular mischief and inconvenience, which maketh it even in this life a punishment to it self; and com-

monly, the providence of God and his just judgment upon sinners, strikes in to heighten the mischievons consequences of a sinful course. This we have represented in the Parable of the Prodigal; his riotous course of life did naturally and of it self bring him to want, but the providence of God likewise concurred to render his condition more miserable, *at the same time there arose a mighty famine in the land*; so that he did not only want wherewithall to supply himself, but was cut off from all hopes of relief from the abundance and superfluity of others. Sin brings many miseries upon us, and God many times sends more and greater than sin brings; and the further we go on in a sinful course, the more miseries and the greater difficulties we involve our selves in.

Luc. 15, 14.

But all these are but light and inconsiderable, in comparison of the dreadful miseries of another world; to the danger whereof, every man that lives a wicked life doth every moment expose himself. So that if we could conquer shame, and had stupidity enough to bear the infamy and reproach of our vices, and the upbraidings of our consciences for them, and the temporal mischiefs and inconveniences of them; though for the present gratifying of our lusts we could brook and dispense

ſpenſe with all theſe, yet the conſideration of the end and iſſue of a ſinful courſe, is an invincible objection againſt it, and never to be anſwered; though the violence of our ſenſual appetites and inclinations ſhould be able to bear down all temporal conſiderations whatſoever, yet methinks the intereſt of our everlaſting happineſs ſhould lye near our hearts, the conſideration of another world ſhould mightily amaze and ſtartle us; the horrors of eternal darkneſs, and the diſmal thought of being miſerable for ever, ſhould effectually diſcourage any man from a wicked life. And this danger continually threatens the ſinner, and may, if God be not merciful to him, happen to ſurprize him the next moment And can we make too much haſte, to flye from ſo great and apparent a danger? When will we think of ſaving our ſelves, if not when (for ought we know) we are upon the very brink of ruine, and juſt ready to drop into deſtruction?

5. Upon this naturally follows, *a full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this wicked courſe.* And neceſſity is always a powerful and over-ruling argument, and doth rather compel than perſwade: And after it is once evident, leaves no

place for further deliberation. And the greater the neceſſity is, it is ſtill the more cogent argument. For whatever is neceſſary is ſo in order to ſome end; and the greater the end, the greater is the neceſſity of the means without which that end cannot be obtained. Now the chief and laſt end of all Reaſonable creatures is happineſs, and therefore whatever is neceſſary in order to that, hath the higheſt degree of rational and moral neceſſity. We are not capable of happineſs, till we have left our ſins, for *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* Heb. 12, 14.

But though men are convinced of this neceſſity, yet this doth not always enforce a preſent change; becauſe men hope they may continue in their ſins, and remedy all at laſt by repentance. But this is ſo great a hazard in all reſpects, that there is no venturing upon it: And in matters of greateſt concernment wiſe men will run no hazards, if they can help it. *David* was ſo ſenſible of this danger, that he would not defer his tepentance and the change of his life for one moment; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies: I made haſte and delayed not to keep thy commandments*

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This day, *this* hour, for ought we know, may be the laſt opportunity of making our peace with God. Therefore we ſhould make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate, as *Lot* did out of *Sodom*, leſt fire and brimſtone overtake us. He that cannot promiſe himſelf the next moment, hath a great deal of reaſon to ſeize upon the preſent opportunity. While we are *lingering* in our ſins, if God be not merciful to us, we ſhall be conſumed. Therefore *make haſte*, ſinner, and *eſcape for thy life, leſt evil overtake thee.* Gen.19,16,17,19.

6. Laſtly, *An apprehenſion of the poſſibility of making this change.* God who deſigned us for happineſs at firſt, and after we had made a forfeiture of it by ſin, was pleaſed to reſtore us again to the capacity of it by the Redemption of our bleſſed Lord and Saviour, hath made nothing neceſſary to our happineſs that is impoſſible for us to do, either of our ſelves, or by the aſſiſtance of that grace which he is ready to afford us, if we heartily beg it of him. For that is poſſible to us, which we may do by the aſſiſtance of another, if we may have that aſſiſtance for asking: And God hath promiſed to *give his holy Spirit to them that ask him.* So that notwithſtanding Luc.11,13.

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the great corruption and weakneſs of our natures, ſince the grace of God which brings ſalvation hath appeared, it is not abſolutely out of our power to leave our ſins, and to turn to God: For that may truely be ſaid to be in our power, which God hath promiſed to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our ſelves.

So that there is nothing on Gods part to hinder this change. He hath ſolemnly declared, that he ſincerely deſires it, and that he is ready to aſſiſt our good reſolutions to this purpoſe. And moſt certainly, when he tells us, that *he hath no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs and live*; that *he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledg of the truth*; that *he would not that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.* He means plainly as he ſaith, and doth not ſpeak to us with any private reſerve or nice diſtinction between his ſecret and revealed will, that is, he doth not decree one thing, and declare the contrary. So far is it from this, that if a ſinner entertain ſerious thoughts of returning to God, and do but once move towards him, how ready is he to

Ezek. 33, 11.

1 Tim. 2. 4.

2 Pet. 3, 9.

receive

receive him! This is, in a very lively manner, deſcribed to us in the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*, who when he was returning home, and *was yet a great way off*, what haſte doth his Father make to meet him? *he ſaw him, and had compaſſion, and ran.* And if there be no impediment on Gods part, why ſhould there be any on ours? One would think all the doubt and difficulty ſhould be on the other ſide, Whether God would be pleaſed to ſhew mercy to ſuch great offenders as we have been. But the buſineſs doth not ſtick there. And will we be miſerable by our own choice, when the Grace of God hath put it into our power to be happy? I have done with the firſt thing, The courſe which *David* here took for the reforming of his life; *I thought on my ways.* I proceed to the Luc. 15. 20.

II. *The ſucceſs of this courſe.* It produced actual and ſpeedy reformation. *I turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies; I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And if we conſider the matter throughly, and have but patience to reaſon out the caſe with our ſelves, and to bring our thoughts and deliberations to ſome iſſue, the concluſion muſt naturally be, the quitting of that evil and dange-

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rous course in which we have lived. For sin and consideration can not long dwell together. Did but men consider what sin is, they would have so many unanswerable objections against it, such strong fears and jealousies of the miserable issue and event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not say, that this change is perfectly made at once. A state of sin and holiness are not like two Ways that are just parted by a line, so as a man may step out of the one full into the other; but they are like two Ways that lead to two very distant places, and consequently are at a good distance from one another, and the farther any man hath travelled in the one, the further he is from the other; so that it requires time and pains to pass from the one to the other; It sometimes so happens, that some persons are by a mighty conviction and resolution, and by a very extraordinary and over-powering degree of Gods grace, almost pefectly reclaimed from their sins at once, and all of a sudden *translated out of the Kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of his dear Son.* And thus it was with many of the first Converts to Christianity;

Col. 1, 13.

Christianity; as their prejudices against the Christian Religion were strong and violent, so the holy Spirit of God was pleased to work mightily in them that believed. But in the usual and setled methods of Gods grace, evil habits are mastered and subdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict, and many times after they are routed they rally and make head again; and 'tis a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any considerable degree of strength and maturity, and before a man come to that confirmed state of goodness, that he may be said to have conquered and mortified his lusts. But yet this ought not to discourage us. For so soon as we have seriously begun this change, we are in a good way, and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us; and if we pursue our advantages, we shall every day gain ground, and the work will grow easier upon our hands; and we who moved at first with so much slowness and difficulty, shall after a while be enabled to run the ways of Gods commandments with pleasure and delight.

I have done with the two things I propounded

pounded to ſpeak to from theſe words; The *courſe* here preſcribed, and the *ſucceſs* of it. Ahd now to perſwade men to take this *courſe*, I ſhall offer two or three Arguments.

1. That Conſideration is the proper act of Reaſonable creatures. This argument God himſelf uſes, to bring men to a conſideration of their evil ways. *Iſa.* 46.8, *Remember, and ſhew your ſelves men; bring it again to mind, O ye tranſgreſſors.* To conſider our ways, and to call our ſins to remembrance, is to ſhew our ſelves men. 'Tis the great fault and infelicity of a great many, that they generally live without thinking, and are acted by their preſent inclinations and appetites, without any conſideration of the future conſequences of things, and without fear of any thing but of a preſent and ſenſible danger; like Brute creatures, who fear no evils but what are in view, and juſt ready to fall upon them: Whereas to a prudent and conſiderate man, a good or evil in reverſion is capable of as true an eſtimation, proportionably to the greatneſs and diſtance of it, as if it were really preſent. And what do we think has God given us our reaſon and underſtandings for, but to foreſee evils at a diſtance, and

and to prevent them; to provide for our future ſecurity and happineſs, to look up *to God our Maker, who hath taught us more than the Beaſts of the earth, and made us wiſer than the Fowls of heaven*; but to conſider what we do, and what we ought to do, and what makes moſt for our future and laſting intereſt, and what againſt it? What can a Beaſt do worſe, than to act without any conſideration and deſign, than to purſue his preſent inclination without any apprehenſion of true danger? The moſt dull aud ſtupid of all brute creatures can hardly exerciſe leſs reaſon than this comes to. So that for a man not to conſider his ways, is to the very beſt intents and purpoſes, to be *without underſtanding, and like the beaſts that periſh.* Pal. 49, 20. Job 35, 11.

2. This is the end of Gods patience and long-ſuffering towards us, to bring us to conſideration. The great deſign of Gods *goodneſs* is to *lead men to repentance. He winks at the ſins of men, that they may repent.* He bears long with us, and delays the puniſhment of our ſins, and doth not execute judgment ſpeedily, becauſe he is loth to ſurprize men into deſtruction; becauſe he would give them the liberty of ſecond thoughts,, time Rom. 2, 4. Act. 17, 30.

to

to reflect upon themselves, and to consider what they have done, and to reason themselves into repentance. *Consider this all ye that forget God, lest* his patience turn into fury, and *he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

Ps. 50, 22.

3. Consideration is that which we must all come to, one time or other. Time will come, when we shall consider and cannot help it; when we shall not be able to divert our thoughts from those things, which we are now so loth to think upon. Our consciences will take their opportunity, to bring our ways to remembrance, when some great calamity or affliction is upon us. Thus it was with the Prodigal, when he was brought to the very last extremity, and *was ready to perish for hunger*, then *he came to himself.* When we come to die, then we shall think of our ways with trouble and vexation enough; And how glad would we then be, that we had time to consider them? And perhaps while we are wishing for more time, Eternity will swallow us up. To be sure, in the other world, a great part of the misery of wicked men will consist in furious reflections upon themselves, and the evil actions of their lives. 'Tis said of the

Luc. 15. 7

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Rich voluptuous man in the *Parable*, that *in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment*; as if he had never considered and bethought himself till that time. But alas! it will then be too late to consider: For then consideration will do us no good; it will serve to no other purpose, but to aggravate our misery, and to multiply our stings, and to give new life and rage to those Vultures which will perpetually prey upon our hearts. But how much a wiser course would it be, to consider these things in time, in order to our eternal peace and comfort; to think of them while we may redress them, and avoid the dismal consequences of them, than when our case is desperate and past remedy? Luc. 16. 23.

And now what can I say more, to perswade every one of us to a consideration of our *own ways*? We are generally apt to busie our selves in observing the errors and miscarriages of our neighbours, and are forward to mark and censure the faults and follies of other men; but how few descend into themselves, and turn their eyes inward, and say, *What have I done*? 'Tis an excellent saying of *Antoninus* the great *Emperour* and *Philosopher*, *No man was ever unhappy, for not prying into the acti-*

ons and condition of other men; but that man is necessarily unhappy, who doth not observe himself, and consider the state of his own soul.

This is our proper work; and *now* is a proper season for it, when we pretend to God and men to set apart a solemn time for the examination of our selves, and for a serious review of our lives, in order to humiliation and repentance, to the reforming and amendment of what is amiss. And though we would venture to dissemble with men, yet let us not dissemble with God also; *For shall not he that pondereth the heart consider it, and he that keepeth the soul, shall not he know it; and shall not he render to every man according to his ways? Prov. 24. 12.*

I know it is a very unpleasant work which I am now putting you upon, and therefore no wonder that men are generally so backward to it; because it will of necessity give some present disturbance to their minds. They whose lives have been very vicious, are so odious a sight, so horrid a spectacle to themselves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways; of all things in the world they hate Consideration, and are ready to say to it, as the evil Spirit did in the Gospel

ſpel to our Saviour, *What have I to do with thee? Art thou come to torment me before the time?* But let not this affright us from it; for whatever trouble it may cauſe at preſent, it is the only way to prevent the anguiſh and the torment sof Eternity. Matt. 8,29.

The things which I have offered to your conſideration, are of huge moment and importance. They do not concern your bodies and eſtates, but that which is more truly your ſelves, your immortal ſouls, the dearest and moſt durable part of your ſelves: and they do not concern us for a little while, but for ever. Let me therefore beſpeak your moſt ſerious regard to them, in the words of *Moſes* to the people of *Iſrael*, after he had ſet the law of God before them, together with the bleſſings promiſed to obedience, and the terrible curſe threatned to the tranſgreſſion of it, *Deut.* 32. 46, *Set your hearts to the words which I teſtifie to you this day, for it is not a vain thing, becauſe it is your life. Your life*, your *eternal life* and happineſs depends upon it.

And beſides a tender regard to your ſelves and your own intereſts, which methinks every man, out of a natural de-

ſire of being happy, and dread of being miſerable, ſhould be forward enough to conſider: Be pleaſed likewiſe to lay to heart the influence of your example upon others. I ſpeak now to a great many perſons, the eminence of whoſe rank and quality renders their examples ſo powerful, as to be able almoſt to give authority either to Virtue or Vice. People take their faſhions from you, as to the habits of their minds as well as their bodies. So that upon you chiefly depends the ruine or reformation of manners, our hopes or deſpair of a better world. What way ſoever you go, you are followed by troops. If you run any ſinful or dangerous courſe, you cannot *periſh alone in your iniquity*, but *thouſands will fall by your ſide, and ten thouſands at your right hands:* And on the contrary, 'tis very much in your power, and I hope in your wills and deſigns, to be the ſovereign reſtorers of piety and virtue to a degenerate Age. It is *our* part indeed to exhort men to their duty, but 'tis *you* that would be the powerful and effectual preachers of righteouſneſs: We may endeavour to make men proſelytes to vertue, but you would infallibly draw diſciples after you: We may try to perſwade, but you

could certainly prevail, either to make men good, or to restrain them from being so bad.

Therefore consider your ways, for the sake of others as well as your selves. Consider what you have done, and then consider what is fit for you to do, and if you do it not, what will be the end of these things? And to help you forward in this work, it is not necessary that I should rip up the vices of the Age, and set mens sins in order before them. It is much better, that you your selves should call your own ways to remembrance. We have every one a faithfull Monitor and Witness in our own breasts, who, if we will but hearken to him, will deal impartially with us, and privately tell us the errors of our lives. To this Monitor I refer you, and to the grace of God, to make these admonitions effectual.

Let us then every one of us, in the fear of God, *search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.* Let us *take to our selves words, and say* to God, with those true Penitents in Scripture, *I have sinned, what shall be done unto thee, O thou preserver of men? Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I will abhor my self, and repent in* Lamenat. 3, 40. Hos. 14, 2. Job. 7, 20 cap. 40, 4. cap. 42, 6.

cap. 34. 31, 32. *dust and ashes.* For *surely it is meet to be said unto God, I will not offend any more; that which I know not, teach thou me, and if I have done iniquity I will do no more.* Deut. 5. 29. 32, 29. *O that there were such an heart in us! O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end!* And God, of his infinite mercy, inspire into every one of our hearts this holy and happy resolution; for the sake of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Psal.

Pſal. CXIX: 60.

I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

IN the words immediately going before, you have the courſe which *David* took for the reforming of his life, and the ſucceſs of that courſe; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.* A ſerious reflection upon the paſt errors and miſcarriages of his life, produced the reformation of it. And you have a conſiderable circumſtance added in the words that I have now read to you *viz.* that this reformation was ſpeedy and without delay, *I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* Upon due conſideration of his former life, and a full conviction of the neceſſity of a change, he came to a reſolution of a better life, and immediately put this

resolution in excution; and to declare how presently and quickly he did it, he expresses it both affirmatively and negatively; after the manner of the *Hebrews*, who when they would say a thing with great certainty and *emphasis*, are wont to express it both ways, *I made haste, and delayed not*; that is, I did with all imaginable speed betake my self to a better course.

And this is the natural effect of consideration; and the true cause why men delay so necessary a work, is, because they stifle their reason, and suffer themselves to be hurried into the embraces of present objects, and do not consider their latter end, and what will be the sad issue and event of a wicked life. For if men would take an impartial view of their lives, and but now and then reflect upon themselves, and lay to heart the miserable and fatal consequences of a sinful course, and think whether it will bring them at last, and that the end of these things will be death and misery: If the carnal and sensual person would but look about him, and consider how many have been ruin'd in the way that he is in, how many lye *slain and wounded in it, that it is the way to hell, and leads down to the chambers of death,*

Prov. 7. 27.

death, this would certainly give a check to him, and ſtop him in his courſe.

For it is not to be imagined, but that *that* man who hath duly conſidered what ſin is, the ſhortneſs of its pleaſures, and the eternity of its puniſhment, ſhould reſolve immediately to break off his ſins, and to live another kind of life. Would any man be intemperate and walk after the fleſh, would any man be unjuſt and defraud or oppreſs his neighbour, be prophane and live in the contempt of Cod and Religion, or allow himſelf in any wicked courſe whatſoever, that conſiders and believes a Judgment to come, and that becauſe of theſe things the terrible vengeance of God will one day fall upon the children of diſobedience? It is not credible, that men who apply themſelves ſeriouſly to the meditation of theſe matters, ſhould venture to continue in ſo imprudent and dangerous a courſe, or could by any temptation whatſoever be trained on one ſtep farther in a Way that does ſo certainly and viſibly lead to ruin and deſtruction.

So that my work at this time ſhall be, to endeavour to convince men of the monſtrous folly and unreaſonableneſs of delaying the reformation and amendment of

of their lives; and to perſwade us to reſolve upon it, and having reſolved, to ſet about it immediately and without delay; in imitation of the good man here in the Text, *I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And to this end, I ſhall

Firſt, Conſider the reaſons and excuſes which men pretend for delaying this neceſſary work, and ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

Secondly, I ſhall add ſome farther Conſiderations, to engage us effectually to ſet about this work ſpeedily and without delay.

I. We will conſider a little the reaſons and excuſes which men pretend for delaying this neceſſary work, and not only ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them, but that they are each of them a ſtrong reaſon and powerful argument to the contrary.

1. Many pretend, that they are abundantly convinced of the great neceſſity of leaving their ſins and betaking themſelves to a better courſe, and they fully intend to do ſo; only they cannot at preſent bring themſelves to it, but they hope hereafter to be in a better temper

and

and diſpoſition, and then they reſolve by Gods grace to ſet about this work in good earneſt, and to go through with it.

I know not whether it be fit to call this a Reaſon; I am ſure it is the greateſt cheat and deluſion that any man can put upon himſelf. For this plainly ſhews, that thou doſt not intend to do this, which thou art convinced is ſo neceſſary, but to put it off from day to day. For there is no greater evidence that a man doth not really intend to do a thing, than when notwithſtanding he ought upon all accounts, and may in all reſpects better do it at preſent than hereafter, yet he ſtill puts it off. Whatever thou pretendeſt, this is a meer ſhift to get rid of a preſent trouble: It is like giving good words and making fair promiſes to a clamorous and importunate creditor, and appointing him to come another day, when the man knows in his conſcience that he intends not to pay him, and that he ſhall be leſs able to diſcharge the debt then, than he is at preſent. What ever reaſons thou haſt againſt reforming thy life now, will ſtill remain and be in as full force hereafter, nay, probably ſtronger than they are at

 preſent.

preſent. Thou art unwilling now, and ſo thou wilt be hereafter, and in all likelihood much more unwilling. So that this reaſon will every day improve upon thy hands, and have ſo much the more ſtrength, by how much the longer thou continueſt in thy ſins. Thou haſt no reaſon in the world againſt the preſent time, but only that 'tis *preſent*; why, when hereafter comes to be preſent, the reaſon will be juſt the ſame. So that thy preſent unwillingneſs is ſo far from being a juſt reaſon againſt it, that 'tis a good reaſon the other way; becauſe thou art unwilling now, and like to be ſo, nay, more ſo hereafter; if thou intendeſt to do it at all, thou ſhouldeſt ſet about it immediately, and without delay.

2. Another reaſon which men pretend for the delaying of this work, is the great difficulty and unpleaſantneſs of it. And it cannot be denied, but that there will be ſome bitterneſs and uneaſineſs in it, proportionably to the growth of evil habits, and the ſtrength of our luſts, and our greater or leſs progreſs and continuance in a ſinful courſe: So that we muſt make account of a ſharp conflict, of ſome pain and trouble in the making of this change, that it will coſt us ſome pangs

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and throws before we be born again. For when nature hath been long bent another way, it is not to be expected that it ſhould be reduced and brought back to its firſt ſtreightneſs without pain and violence.

But then it is to be conſidered, that how difficult and painful ſoever this work be, it is neceſſary; and that ſhould overrule all other conſiderations whatſoever: that if we will not be at this pains and trouble, we muſt one time or other endure far greater than thoſe which we now ſeek to avoid: that it is not ſo difficult as we imagine, but our fears of it are greater than the trouble will prove; if we were but once reſolved upon the work, and ſeriouſly engaged in it, the greateſt part of the trouble were over; it is like the fear of children to go into the cold water, a faint trial increaſeth their fear and apprehenſion of it; but ſo ſoon as they have plunged into it, the trouble is over, and then they wonder why they were ſo much afraid. The main difficulty and unpleaſantneſs is in our firſt entrance into Religion; it preſently grows tolerable, and ſoon after eaſie, and after that by degrees ſo pleaſant and delightful, that the man would not

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for all the world return to his former evil ſtate and condition of life.

We ſhould conſider likewiſe, what is the true cauſe of all this trouble and difficulty; 'Tis our long continuance in a ſinful courſe that hath made us ſo loth to leave it; 'Tis the cuſtom of ſinning that renders it ſo troubleſome and uneaſie to men to do otherwiſe: 'Tis the greatneſs of our guilt, heightned and inflamed by many and repeated provocations, that doth ſo gall our conſciences, and fill our ſouls with ſo much terror; 'Tis becauſe we have gone ſo far in an evil way, that our retreat is become ſo difficult; and becauſe we have delayed this work ſo long, that we are now ſo unwilling to go about it; and conſequently, the longer we delay it, the trouble and difficulty of a change will encreaſe dayly upon us. And all theſe conſiderations are ſo far from being a good reaſon for more delays, that they are a ſtrong argument to the contrary: Becauſe the work is difficult now, therefore do not make it more ſo; and becauſe your delays have encreaſed the difficulty of it, and will do more and more, therefore delay no longer.

2. Another pretended encouragement

to

to these delays, is the great mercy and patience of God. He commonly bears long with sinners, and therefore there is no such absolute and urgent necessity of a speedy repentance and reformation of our lives. Men have not the face to give this for a reason; but yet for all that, it lies at the bottom of many mens hearts: So *Solomon* tells us, *Eccles.* 8. 11, *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

But it is not alway thus. There are few of us but have seen several instances of Gods severity to sinners, and have known several persons surprized by a sudden hand of God, and cut off in the very act of sin, without having the least respite given them, without time or liberty so much as to ask God forgiveness, and to consider either what they had done, or whither they were a-going. And this may be the case of any sinner, and is so much the more likely to be thy case, because thou dost so boldly presume upon the mercy and patience of God.

But if it were always thus, and thou wert sure to be spared yet awhile lon-

ger;

ger; what can be more unreaſonable and diſingenuous, than to reſolve to be evil becauſe God is good, and becauſe he ſuffers ſo long, to ſin ſo much the longer; and becauſe he affords thee a ſpace of repentance, therefore to delay it and put it off to the laſt? The proper deſign of Gods goodneſs is to lead men to repentance, and he never intended his patience for an encouragement to men to continue in their ſins, but for an opportunity and an argument to break them off by repentance.

Theſe are the pretended reaſons and encouragements to men to delay their repentance and the reformation of their lives; and you ſee how groundleſs and unreaſonable they are; which was the *firſt* thing I propounded to ſpeak to.

II. I ſhall add ſome farther conſiderations, to engage men effectually to ſet about this work ſpeedily, and without delay. And becauſe they are many, I ſhall inſiſt upon thoſe which are moſt weighty and conſiderable, without being very curious and ſolicitous about the method and order of them: For provided they be but effectual to the end of perſwaſion, it matters not how inartificially

cially they are rang'd and disposed.

1. Consider, that in matter of great and necessary concernment, and which must be done, there is no greater argument of a weak and impotent mind, than irresolution; to be undermined, where the case is so plain, and the necessity so urgent; to be always about doing that, which we are convinced must be done.

Victuros agimus semper, nec vivimus unquam.

We are always intending to live a new life, but can never find a time to set about it: This is as if a man should put off eating and drinking and sleeping from one day and night to another, till he have starved and destroyed himself. It seldom falls under any mans deliberation, whether he should live or not, if he can chuse; and if he cannot chuse, 'tis in vain to deliberate about it. It is much more absurd to deliberate, whether we should live virtuously and religiously, soberly and righteously in the world; for *that* upon the matter is to consult, whether a man should be happy or not: Nature hath determined this for us, and we need not reason about it; and con-

ſequently, we ought not to delay that which we are convinced is ſo neceſſary in order to it.

2. Conſider, that Religion is a great and a long work; and asks ſo much time, that there is none left for the delaying of it. To begin with Repentance, which is commonly our firſt entrance into Religion; This alone is a great work, and is not only the buſineſs of a ſudden thought and reſolution, but of execution and action: 'Tis the abandoning of a ſinful courſe, which we cannot leave till we have in ſome degree maſtered our luſts; for ſo long as they are our maſter, like *Pharaoh* they will keep us in bondage, and *not let us go to ſerve the Lord.* The habits of ſin and vice are not to be plucked up and caſt off at once; as they have been long in contracting, ſo without a miracle, it will require a competent time to ſubdue them and get the victory over them: for they are conquered juſt by the ſame degrees that the habits of grace and virtue grow up and get ſtrength in us.

So that there are ſeveral duties to be done in Religion, and often to be repeated; many graces and virtues are to be long practiſed and exerciſed, before the

the contrary vices will be ſubdued, and before we a rrive to a confirmed and ſetled ſtate of goodneſs; ſuch a ſtate as can only give us a clear and comfortable evidence of the ſincerity of our reſolution and repentance, and of our good condion towards God. We have many luſts to mortifie, many paſſions to govern and bring into order; much good to do, to make what amends and reparation we can for the much evil we have done: We have many things to learn; and many to unlearn, to which we ſhall be ſtrongly prompted by the corrupt inclinations of our nature, and the remaining power of ill habits and cuſtoms: and perhaps we have ſatisfaction and reſtitution to make for the many injuries we have done to others, in their perſons, or eſtates, or reputations: In a word, we have a *body of ſin* to put off, which clings cloſe to us, and is hard to part with; we have to *cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and to perfect holineſs in the fear of God*; to encreaſe and improve our graces and virtues; to *add to our faith knowledg*, and *temperance*, and *patience*, and *brotherly kindneſs*, and *charity*; and *to abound in all the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are* 2 Corin. 7, 1. 2 Pet. 1, 5, 6. Phil. 1, 11.

by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God: We have to be useful to the world, and exemplary to others in a holy and virtuous conversation; our *light is so to shine before men, that others may see our good works, and glorifie our father which is in heaven.* Mat. 5, 16.

And do we think all this is to be done in an instant, and requires no time? That we may delay and put off to the last, and yet do all this work well enough? Do we think we can do all this in time of sickness and old age, when we are not fit to do any thing, when *the spirit of a man* can hardly *bear the infirmities* of nature, much less a guilty conscience and *a wounded spirit?* Do we think that when the day hath been idlely spent and squandered away by us, that we shall be fit to work when the night and darkness comes? When our understanding is weak, and our memory frail, and our will crooked, and by a long custom of sinning obstinately bent the wrong way, what can we then do in Religion? what reasonable or acceptable service can we then perform to God? when our candle is just sinking into the socket, how shall *our light so shine before men, that others may see our good works?*

Prov. 18, 14.

Alas!

Alas! the longeſt life is no more than ſufficient for a man to reform himſelf in, to repent of the errors of his life, and to amend what is amiſs; to put our ſouls into a good poſture and preparation for another world, to train up our ſelves for eternity, and to make our ſelves *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light.* Col. 1, 12.

3. Conſider, what a deſperate hazard we run by theſe delays. Every delay of repentance is a venturing the main chance. It is uncertain whether hereafter we ſhall have time for it, and if we have time, whether we ſhall have a heart to it, and the aſſiſtance of Gods grace to go thorough with it. God indeed hath been graciouſly pleaſed to promiſe pardon to repentance, but he hath no-where promiſed life and leiſure, the aids of his grace and holy Spirit to thoſe who put off their repentance: He hath no-where promiſed acceptance to meer ſorrow and trouble for ſin, without *fruits meet for repentance, and amendment of life:* He hath no-where promiſed to receive them to mercy and favour, who only give him good words, and are at laſt contented to condeſcend ſo far to him, as to promiſe to leave their ſins when they can Mat. 3, 8. Act. 26, 20.

keep them no longer. Many have gone thus far in times of affliction and sicknes, as to be awakened to a great sense of their sins, and to be mightily troubled for their wicked lives, and to make solemn promises and professions of becoming better; and yet upon their deliverance and recovery all hath vanished and come to nothing, and their *righteousness hath been as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which passeth away*: And why should any man, meerly upon account of a death-bed repentance, reckon himself in a better condition than those persons, who have done as much, and gone as far as he; and there is no other difference between them but this, that the repentance of the former was tryed, and proved insincere, but the *death-bed repentance* never came to a tryal; and yet for all that, God knows whether it were sincere or not, and how it would have proved if the man had lived longer. Why should any man, for offering up to God the meer refuse and dregs of his life, and the days *which himself hath no pleasure in*, expect to receive the reward of eternal life and happiness at his hands?

Hos. 13. 3.

Eccles. 12. 1.

But though we do not design to delay this work so long, yet ought we to consider

consider, that all delays in a matter of this consequence are extreamly dangerous; because we put off a business of the greatest concernment to the future; and in so doing, put it to the hazard whether ever it shall be done: For the future is as much out of our power to command, as it is to call back the time which is past. Indeed if we could arrest time, and strike off the nimble wheels of his Charriot, and like *Joshua* bid the Sun stand still, and make opportunity tarry as long as we had occasion for it; this were something to excuse our delay, or at least to mitigate and abate the folly and unreasonableness of it: But this we cannot do. It is in our power, under the influence of Gods grace and holy Spirit, to amend our lives now, but it is not in our power to live till to morrow; and who would part with an estate in hand, which he may presently enter upon the possession of, for an uncertain reversion? And yet thus we deal in the great and everlasting concernments of our souls; we trifle away the present opportunities of salvation, and vainly promise to our selves the future; we let go that which is in our power, and fondly dispose of that which is out of our power, and in the hands of God.

Lay hold then upon the present opportunities, and look upon every action thou dost, and every opportunity of doing any, as possibly thy last; for so it may prove, for any thing thou canst tell to the contrary. If a mans life lay at stake, and he had but one throw for it, with what care and with what concernment would he manage that action? What thou art doing next may, for ought thou knowest, be for thy life, and for all eternity. So much of thy life is most certainly past, and God knows thou hast yet done little or nothing towards the securing of thy future happiness: It is not certain, how much or how little is remaining, therefore be sure to make the best use of that little which may be left, and wisely to manage the last stake.

4. Seeing the delay of repentance doth mainly rely upon the hopes and encouragement of a future repentance, let us consider a little how unreasonable these hopes are, and how absurd the encouragement is which men take from them. To sin in hopes that hereafter we shall repent, is to do a thing in hopes that we shall be one day mightily ashamed of it, that we shall one time or other be heartily grieved and troubled that we have

done

done it: It is to do a thing in hopes that we ſhall afterwards condemn our ſelves for it, and wiſh a thouſand times we had never done it; in hopes that we ſhall be full of horrour at the thoughts of what we have done, and ſhall treaſure up ſo much guilt in our conſciences as will make us a terror to our ſelves, and be ready to drive us even to deſpair and diſtraction. And is this a reaſonable hope? Is this a fitting encouragement for a wiſe man to give to himſelf, to any action? And yet this is plainly the true meaning of mens going on in their ſins, in hopes that hereafter they ſhall repent of them.

5. If you be ſtill reſolved to delay this buſineſs, and put it off at preſent; conſider well with your ſelves, how long you intend to delay it. I hope not to the laſt; not till ſickneſs come, and death make his approaches to you. This is next to madneſs, to venture all upon ſuch an after-game. 'Tis juſt as if a man ſhould be content to be ſhipwrackt, in hope that he ſhall afterwards eſcape by a plank, and get ſafe to ſhore. But I hope none are ſo unreaſonable; yet I fear that many have a mind to put it off to old age, though they do not care to ſay ſo. *Seneca* expoſtu-

Detrimentis vitæ cap. 4.

expoſtulates excellently with this ſort of men; "Who ſhould enſure thy life till "that time? Who ſhall paſs his word for "thee, that the providence of God will "ſuffer all things to happen and fall out, "juſt as thou haſt deſigned and forecaſt "them? Art thou not aſhamed to reſerve "the reliques of thy life for thy ſelf, and "to ſet apart only that time to be wiſe "and virtuous in, which is good for no-"thing? How late is it then to begin "to live well, when thy life is almoſt at "an end? What a ſtupid forgetfulneſs is it "of our mortality, to put off good re-"ſolutious to the fiftieth or ſixtieth year "of our age, and to reſolve to begin to "do better at *that* time of life, to which "but very few perſons have reached?

But perhaps thou art not altogether ſo unreaſonable, but deſireſt only to reſpite this work, till the firſt heat of youth and luſt be over, till the cooler and more conſiderare part of thy life come on: *that* perhaps thou thinkeſt may be the fitteſt and moſt convenient ſeaſon. But ſtill we reckon upon uncertainties, for perhaps that ſeaſon may never be: however, to be ſure it is much more in our power, by the aſſiſtance of Gods grace, which is never wanting to the ſincere en-

deavours of men, to conquer our lusts now, and to resist the most heady and violent temptations to vice, than either to secure the future time, or to recover that which is once past and gone.

Some seem yet more reasonable, and are content to come lower, and desire only to put it off for a very little while. But why for a little while? why till to morrow? To morrow will be as this day, only with this difference, that thou wilt in all probability be more unwilling and indisposed *then*.

So that there is no *future* time which any man can reasonably pitch upon. All delay in this case is dangerous, and as senseless as the expectation of the *Ideot*, described by the *Poet*; who being come to the river side, and intending to pass over, stays till all the water in the river be gone by, and hath left the channel a dry passage for him.

——————*at ille*
Labitur, & labetur in omne volubilis ævum. Hor. Epist. 1, 2, 42.

But the river runs, and runs, and will run, and if he should stay a thousand years, will never be the nearer being dry.

So

So that if the man muſt go over, and there be a neceſſity for it, (as there is for Repentance) the only wiſe reſolution to be taken in this caſe, is to wade or ſwim over as well as he can, becauſe the matter will never be mended by tarrying.

6. *Laſtly*, Conſider what an unſpeakable happineſs it is, to have our minds ſettled in that condition, that we may without fear and amazement, nay, with comfort and confidence, expect death and judgment. Death is never far from any of us, and the general Judgment of the world may be nearer than we are aware of; for *of that day and hour knoweth no man:* And theſe are two terrible things; and nothing can free us from the terror of them, but a good conſcience; and a good conſcience is only to be had, either by innocence, or by repentance and amendment of life. Happy man! who by this means is at peace with God, and with himſelf; and can think of death and judgment, without dread and aſtoniſhment. For *the ſting of death is ſin*; and the terror of the great day only concerns thoſe, who have lived wickedly and impenitently, and would not be perſwaded, neither by

Matt. 24. 36. Mar. 13. 32.

1 Cor. 15. 56.

by the mercies of God, nor by the fear of his judgments, to repent and turn to him: But if we have truely forſaken our ſins, and do ſincerely endeavour to live in obedience to the Laws and Commands of God, the more we think of death and judgment, the greater matter of joy and comfort will theſe things be to us: For *bleſſed is that ſervant, whom his Lord when he comes ſhall find ſo doing.* Let us therefore, as ſoon as poſſibly we can, put our ſelves into this poſture and preparation; according to that advice of our bleſſed Saviour, *Luke* 12. 35, 36, *Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye your ſelves like unto men that wait for their Lord.* Matt. 24. 46.

And now I hope that enough hath been ſaid, to convince men of the great unreaſonableneſs and folly of theſe delays; nay, I believe that moſt men are convinced of it by their own thoughts, and that their conſciences call them fools a thouſand times for it: But O that I knew what to ſay, that might prevail with men, and effectually perſwade them to do that which they are ſo abundantly convinced is ſo neceſſary.

And

And here I might addreſs my ſelf to the ſeveral ages of perſons. You that are *young*, and have hitherto been in a good meaſure innoeent, may prevent the Devil, and by an early piety give God the firſt poſſeſſion of your ſouls; and by this means, never be put to the trouble of ſo great and ſolemn a repentance, having never been deeply engaged in a wicked life: You may do a glorious, I had almoſt ſaid a meritorious thing, in cleaving ſtedfaſtly to God, and reſolving to ſerve him, when you are ſo importunately courted, and ſo hotly aſſaulted by the Devil and the World. However, you may not live to be old; therefore upon that conſideration begin the work preſently, and make uſe of the opportunity that is now in your hands.

You that are grown up to *ripeneſs of years*, and are in the full vigor of your age; *you* are to be put in mind, that the heat and inconſiderateneſs of youth is now paſt and gone; that reaſon and conſideration are now in their perfection and ſtrength; that this is the very age of prudence and diſcretion, of wiſdom and warineſs: So that now is the

the proper time for you to be ſerious, and wiſely to ſecure your future happineſs.

As for thoſe that are *old*, *they* methinks ſhould need no body to admoniſh them, that it is now high time for them to begin a new life, and that the time paſt of their lives is too much to have ſpent in ſin and folly. There is no trifling where men have a great work to do, and but little time to do it in. Your Sun is certainly going down and near its ſetting; therefore you ſhould quicken your pace, conſidering that your journey is never the ſhorter becauſe you have but little time to perform it in. Alas man! thou art juſt ready to dye, and haſt thou not yet begun to live? Are thy paſſions and luſts yet unſubdued, and have they had no other mortification than what age hath given them? 'Tis ſtrange to ſee, how in the very extremities of old age, many men are as if they had ſtill a thouſand years to live, and make no preparation for death, though it dogs them at the heels, and is juſt come up to them and ready to give them the fatal ſtroke.

Therefore let us not put off this neceſſary

ceſſary work of reforming our ſelves, in what part and age of our lives ſoever we be. *To day, whilſt it is called to day, leaſt any of you be hardened thorough the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* Nay, to day is with the lateſt to begin this work, had we been wiſe we would have begun it ſooner. 'Tis Gods infinite mercy to us, that it is not quite too late, that the day of Gods patience is not quite expired, and the door ſhut againſt us. Therefore do not defer your repentance to the next ſolemn time, to the next occaſion of receiving the bleſſed Sacrament: Do not ſay, I will then reform and become a new man, after *that* I will take leave of my luſts and ſin no more. For let us make what haſte we can, we cannot poſſibly make too much.

Heb. 3, 13.

Martial. 2, 90 *properat vivere nemo ſatis.*

No man makes haſte enough to be good, to *ceaſe to do evil, and to learn to do well.* Be as quick as we will, life will be too nimble for us, and go on faſter than our work does; and death will go nigh to prevent us, and ſurprize us unaware.

Js. 1, 16, 17.

Do

Do, do *sinner*; abuse and neglect thy self yet a little while longer, till the time of regarding thy soul and working out thy own salvation be at an end, and all the opportunities of minding that great concernment be slipped out of thy hands, never to be recovered, never to be called back again; no, not by thy most earnest wishes and desires, by thy most fervent prayers and tears; and thou be brought into the condition of *prophane Esau*, who for once despising the Blessing, lost it for ever; *and found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.* Heb. 12, 17.

To conclude: Art thou convinced, that thy eternal happiness depends upon following the advice which hath now been given thee? Why then, do but behave thy self in this case, as thou and all prudent men are wont to do in matters which thou canst not but acknowledg to be of far less concernment. If a man be travelling to such a place, so soon as he finds himself out of the way, he presently stops and makes towards the right way, and hath no inclination to go wrong any further: If a man be sick, he will be well pre-

ſently if he can, and not put it off to the future: Moſt men will gladly take the firſt opportunity that preſents it ſelf, of being rich or great; every man almoſt catches at the very firſt offers of a great place or a good purchaſe, and ſecures them preſently if he can, leſt the opportunity be gone, and another ſnatch theſe things from him. Do thou thus ſo much more, in matters ſo much greater. Return from the error of thy way, be well, ſave thy ſelf, as ſoon as poſſibly thou canſt. When happineſs preſents it ſelf to thee, do not turn it off, and bid it come again to morrow. Perhaps thou mayeſt never be ſo fairly offered again; perhaps the day of ſalvation may not come again to morrow; nay, perhaps *to thee* to morrow may never come. But if we were ſure that happineſs would come again, yet why ſhould we put it off? Does any man know how to be ſafe and happy to day, and can he find in his heart to tarry till to morrow?

Now the God of all mercy and patience, give every one of us the wiſdom and grace, to *know* and to do *in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes*;

Luc. 19, 42.

eyes; for the ſake of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer; *To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory now and for ever*, Amen.

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1 John III. 10.

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.

IT is certainly a matter of the greatest consequence to us, both in order to our present peace and future happiness, truly to understand our spiritual state and condition, and whether we belong to God and be his Children or not: And it is not so difficult as is commonly imagined to arrive at this knowledg, if we have a mind to it, and will but deal impartially with our selves; For the Text gives us a plain mark and character whereby we may know it, *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of*

the Devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.

From which words I shall endeavour by Gods assistance, to lay men open to themselves, and to represent to every one of us the truth of our condition; and then leave it to the grace of God, and every mans serious consideration, to make the best use of it.

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this matter, to consider briefly the occasion of these words. And this will best appear by attending stedfastly to the main scope and design of this *Epistle*. And I think that no man that reads it with attention can doubt, but that it is particularly designed against the impious Sect of the *Gnosticks*; who, as the *Fathers* tell us, sprang from *Simon* Magus, and pretended to extraordinary *knowledg* and illumination, from whence they had the name of *Gnosticks*; but notwithstanding this glittering pretence, they did allow themselves in all manner of impious and vicious practices, *turning the grace of God into lasciviousness*, as St. *Jude* speaks of them. And that St. *John* particularly aims at this sort of men, is very evident from the frequent and plain allusions throughout this *Epistle*, to those Names

and

and Titles which this Sect assumed to themselves, as *Chap.* 2. *ver.* 4, *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* And *vers.* 9, *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.* Which passages, and many more in this *Epistle*, do plainly refer to the pretences of this *Sect*, to more than ordinary *knowledg* and *illumination* in the mysteries of Religion; notwithstanding they did so notoriously contradict these glorious pretences by the impiety of their lives, and particularly by their hatred and enmity to their fellow-Christians. For, as the *ancient Fathers* tell us, they pretended that whatever they did, they could not sin: And this our *Apostle* intimates in the beginning of this *Epistle*, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us.* And they held it lawful to renounce Christianity to avoid persecution; and not only so, but also to joyn with the Heathen in persecuting the Christians; which seems to be the reason why the *Apostle* so often taxeth them for *hatred to their Brethren*; and calls them *Murderers.*

Now to shew the inconsistence of these

principles and practises with Christianity, the Apostle useth many arguments; amongst which, he particularly insisteth upon this, That nothing is more essential to a *Disciple of Christ* and a *Child of God* (by which Titles Christians were commonly known), than to abstain from the practise of all sin and wickedness; *vers.* 6. of this *Chap. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him*, (whatever knowledg they might pretend to, it was evident they were destitute of the true knowledg of God and his Son *Jesus Christ*) and *vers.* 7, *Little Children, let no man deceive you; he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous*; and *vers.* 8, *He that committeth sin is of the Devil*; and *vers.* 9, *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin*; let men pretend what they will, wickedness is a plain mark and character of one that belongs to the *Devil*; as on the contrary, righteousness is an evidence of a *Child of God*, *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil*, &c.

I shall briefly explain the words, and then consider the matter contained in them.

By

By the children of God, and the children of the Devil, are meant good and bad men; It being usual in the phrase of Scripture, to call persons or things which partake of such a nature or quality, the children of those who are eminently endued with that nature and disposition. Thus they who are of the faith of *Abraham*, and do the works of *Abraham*, are called *Abraham's children*: In like manner, those who in their disposition and actions imitate God, are called *the children of God*; and on the contrary, those that addict themselves to sin and impiety are counted of another race and descent, they resemble the Devil, and belong to him as the Chief and Head of that Faction.

By *righteousness*, is here meant universal goodness and conformity to the Law of God, in opposition to sin which is the transgression of that Law.

By being *manifest*, is meant, that hereby good and bad men are really distinguished; so that every one that will examine his condition by this mark, may know of which number he is, and to what Party he belongs.

I come now to the main argument contained in the words, which is to give us a cer-

certain character, and mark of diſtinction between a good and bad man; ἐν τούτῳ, *by this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil: whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.*

In the management of the following Diſcourſe, I ſhall proceed in this method.

Firſt, We will conſider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here laid down; *Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.*

Secondly, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, come to the knowledg of his ſpiritual eſtate and condition. *By this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil.*

Thirdly, I ſhall enquire whence it comes to paſs, that notwithſtanding this, ſo many perſons are at ſo great uncertainty concerning their condition.

I. We will conſider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here in the Text, *Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God*; which implies likewiſe on the contrary, that *whoſoever doth righteouſneſs, is of God.* Now in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of this

this phrase, he only who lives in all the commandments of God blameless, can be said to *do righteousness*: But in this sense *there is none that doth righteousness, no not one*, and consequently none could be the Children of God; but the Text supposes some to be so, and therefore by *doing righteousness* the *Apostle* must necessarily be understood to mean something that is short of perfect and unsinning obedience. So that the question is, What *doing of righteousness* is sufficient to denominate a man a *Child of God*, and to put him into a state of grace and favour with Him.

And I do not intend nicely to state this matter. 'Tis not perhaps possible to be done; nothing being more difficult, than to determine the very utmost bounds and limits of things, and to tell exactly and just to a point where the line of difference between Virtue and Vice, between the state of a good and bad man is to be placed: And if it could be done, it would be of no great use; for I take it to be no part of my business to tell men how many faults they may have, and how little goodness, and yet be *the children of God*: but rather to acquaint them, what degrees of holiness and good-

ness

neſs are neceſſary to give men a clear and comfortable evidence of their good eſtates towards God; and then to perſwade them, in order to their peace and aſſurance, to endeavour after ſuch degrees.

Wherefore to ſtate the buſineſs ſo far as is neceſſary to give men a ſufficient knowledg of their condition, I ſhall briefly conſider who they are that in the Apoſtles ſenſe may be ſaid to be *doers of righteouſneſs*, or *not doers of it*. And becauſe the *Apoſtle* lays down the Rule negatively, I ſhall therefore

In the *firſt* place, enquire who they are that in the *Apoſtles* ſenſe may be ſaid *not to do righteouſneſs*.

1. They that live in the general courſe of a wicked life, in the practiſe of great and known ſins, as injuſtice, intemperance, filthy and ſenſual luſts, profane neglect and contempt of God and Religion; ſo that by the whole courſe and tenour of their actions, it is plain beyond all denial that *there is no fear of God before their eyes*. Concerning theſe the caſe is ſo very evident, that it ſeems too mild and gentle an expreſſion to call them *not doers of righteouſneſs*.

2. They who live in the habitual practice

ctice of any one known ſin, or in the neglect of any conſiderable part of their known duty. For any vicious habit denominates a man, and puts him into an evil ſtate.

3. They who are guilty of the ſingle act of a very heinous and notorious crime; as a deliberate act of blaſphemy, of murther, perjury, fraud or oppreſſion, or of any other crime of the like enormity. For though ordinarily one ſingle act of ſin doth not denominate one a bad man, when the general courſe of the mans life is contrary; yet the ſingle acts of ſome ſorts of ſins are ſo crying and heinous, and do ſo ſtare every mans conſcience in the face, that they are juſtly eſteemed to be of equal malignity with vicious habits of an inferiour kind; becauſe they do almoſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe a great depravation of mind, and a monſtrous alienation from God and goodneſs in the perſon that deliberately commits them. And they who are guilty in any of theſe three degrees now mentioned, are moſt certainly *not doers of righteouſneſs*, and conſequently it is *manifeſt* that they are not *the children of God.*

In the *ſecond* place, I ſhall enquire who they are, that in the *Apoſtles* ſenſe may be

be ſaid to *do righteouſneſs.* In ſhort, they who in the general courſe of their lives do keep the Commandments of God. And thus the *Scripture* generally expreſſeth this matter, by *keeping the commandments of God*, and by *having reſpect to all his commandment*, by *obedience to the Goſpel of Chriſt*, by being *holy in all manner of converſation*; by *abſtaining from all kind of evil*, by *cleanſing our ſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit*, and by *practiſing holineſs in the fear of God*: To which I ſhall add the deſcription which St. *Luke* gives us of the *righteouſneſs* of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, Luk. 1. 6, *They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameleſs.* All which expreſſions do plainly ſignifie the actual conformity of our lives and actions, in the general courſe and tenour of them, to the Laws and commands of God. And this implies theſe two things; That *the tenour of our lives and actions be agreeable to theſe Laws of God*: And that *theſe actions be done with a ſincere and upright mind*, out of regard to God and another World, and not for low and temporal ends.

And I chuſe rather to deſcribe a righteous

teous man by the actual conformity of the general course of his actions to the Law of God, than (as some have done) by a sincere Desire or resolution of obedience. For a desire may be sincere for the time it lasts, and yet vanish before it come to any real effect. And how innocently soever it was intended, it is certainly a great mistake in Divinity, and of very dangerous consequence to the souls of men, to affirm that a Desire of grace is grace ; and conseqently, by the same reason, that a desire of obedience, is obedience. A sincere desire and resolution to be good is indeed a good beginning, and ought by all means to be cherished and encouraged ; but yet it is far enough from being the thing desired, or from being accepted for it in the esteem of God: For God never accepts the Desire for the deed, but where there is no possibility, no opportunity of doing the thing desired ; but if there be, and the thing be not done, there is no reason to imagine that the desire in that case should be accepted as if the thing were done. For instance, If a man give alms according to his ability, and would give more if he were able, in this case the desire is accepted for the deed. And of this case it is

and

and no other, that the *Apoſtle* ſpeaks, 2 *Cor.* 8. 12, *If there be firſt a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* That is, God interprets and accepts the charity of men according to the largeneſs of their hearts, and not according to the ſtraitneſs of their fortunes: But it is a great miſtake, to draw a general concluſion from this Text, that in all caſes God accepts the will for the deed. For though a man ſincerely deſire and reſolve to reform his life (as I doubt not many men often do) but do it not, when there is time and opportunity for it, theſe deſires and reſolutions are of no account with God; all this *righteouſneſs is but as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which paſſeth away.* Men are not apt to miſtake ſo groſly in other matters. No man believes hunger to be meat, or thirſt to be drink; and yet there is no doubt of the truth and ſincerity of theſe natural deſires. No man thinks that covetouſneſs or a greedy deſire to be rich, is an eſtate; or that ambition or an inſatiable deſire of honour is really advancement: Juſt ſo, and no otherwiſe, a deſire to be good is righteouſneſs. The *Apoſtle's* caution a little before the Text, may fitly be applyed

plied to this purpose, *Little children, let no man deceive you: He that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.* Not but that the best of men do sometimes fall through infirmity, and are betrayed by surprise, and born down by the violence of temptation; but if the general course of our actions be a *doing of righteousness*, the grace of the Gospel, in and through the merits of our blessed Saviour, doth accept of this imperfect but sincere obedience.

II. I shall endeavour to shew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, arrive at the certain knowledg of his spiritual state and condition. *By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.* By which the *Apostle* means, that this is a real mark of difference betwixt good and bad men, and that whereby they very often manifest themselves to others; especially when the course of their lives is eminently pious and virtuous, or notoriously impious and wicked. But because it doth not so much concern us curiously to enquire into, much less severely to censure the state of other men, I shall

only consider at present, how far by this mark and character every man may make a certain judgment of his own good or bad condition.

1. By this character, as I have explained it, he that is a bad man may certainly know himself to be so, if he will but consider his condition, and do not wilfully deceive and delude himself. As for those who are vicious in the general course of their lives, or have been guilty of the act of some heinous and notorious sin, not yet repented of; their case is so plain for the most part, even to themselves, that they can have no manner of doubt concerning it. Such men stand continually convicted and condemned by the sentence of their own minds: and when ever they reflect upon themselves (which they do as seldom as they can) they are a *terrour to themselves*, and full of amazement and fearful expectation of judgment. Not but that, even in so plain a case, many men do use great endeavours to cheat themselves; and would be very glad to find out ways to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of Heaven, and to gain the favour, at least the forgiveness of God, without repentance and amendment of their lives. And to this end they

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are willing to confeſs their ſins, and to undergo any Pennance that ſhall be impoſed upon them, that only excepted which only can do them good, I mean, real reformation. And when the Prieſt hath abſolv'd them, they would fain believe that God hath forgiven them too; however, they return to their former courſe, and being ſtrongly addicted to their luſts, between ſtupidity and fooliſh hopes, they at laſt come to this deſperate reſolution, to venture all upon the abſolution of the Prieſt, *Et valeat quantum valere poteſt*, let it have what effect it can; though I dare ſay, that in their moſt ſerious thoughts they are horribly afraid it will do them no good.

And for thoſe who are ſinners of a leſſer race, and perhaps allow themſelves only in one kind of vice, they likewiſe have reaſon to conclude themſelves in a bad condition; eſpecially if they conſider that he who lives in the breach of any one commandment of God is guilty of all, becauſe he contemns that authority which enacted the whole Law. And 'tis eaſie for any man to diſcern the habit of any ſin in himſelf; as when he frequently commits it, when he takes up no firm

resolutions against it, when he useth no competent care to avoid the temptations to it, nor puts forth any vigorous endeavours to break off from it; or however, still continues in the practice of it. For the customary practise of any known sin, is utterly inconsistent with sincere resolutions and endeavours against it; there being no greater evidence of the insincerity of resolutions and endeavours in any kind, than still to go on to do contrary to them.

2. By this character likewise, they that are sincerely good may generally be well assured of their good condition, and that they are *the children of God.* And there are but two things necessary to evidence this to them; That the general course and tenour of their actions be agreeable to the Laws of God; and That they be sincere and upright in those actions. And both these every man may sufficiently know concerning himself; for if the Laws of God be plain, and lye open to every mans understanding, then is it as easie for every man to know when he obeys God and keeps his commandments, as when he obeys the commands of his Father or his Prince, and when he keeps the known

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Laws of the Land. And no ſenſible and conſiderate man ever had any doubt of this kind; for if a man can know any thing, he can certainly tell when he keeps or breaks a known Law; ſo that all doubts of this nature are frivolous and idle pretences to cover mens faults, and ſuch as they would be aſhamed to alledg in any other caſe.

And a good man may likewiſe know when he obeys God ſincerely. Not but that men often deceive themſelves with an opinion, or at leaſt a groundleſs hope of their own ſincerity; but if they will deal fairly with themſelves, and uſe due care and diligence, there are very few caſes (if any) wherein they may not know their own ſincerity in any act of obedience to God: For what can a man know concerning himſelf, if not the reality of his own intentions? If any man ſhould in earneſt tell me, that he doubted very much whether he had that friendſhip for me which he made profeſſion of, and that he was afraid that his affection to me was not real and ſincere, I confeſs I ſhould doubt of it too; becauſe I ſhould certainly conclude that no man could know that matter ſo well as he himſelf.

And there is no doubt but whoever hath

a hearty kindneſs for another, and a ſincere deſire to ſerve and pleaſe him, knows he has it. And accordingly good and holy men in Scripture do every where with great confidence and aſſurance appeal to God, concerning the integrity and ſincerity of their hearts towards him. *Job* and *David*, *Hezekiah* and *Nehemiah* in the *old* Teſtament; and in the *new* St. *Paul* for himſelf and *Timothy*, makes this ſolemn profeſſion of their ſincerity, 2 *Cor.* 1. 12. *Our rejoycing is this, the teſtimony of our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity we have our converſation in the world.* And I cannot call to mind ſo much as any one paſſage in Scripture, from whence it can be collected that any good man ever doubted of his own ſincerity: And to ſay the truth, it would not be modeſty but impudence in any man to declare that he ſuſpects himſelf of hypocriſie; good men have always abbhorred the thoughts of it. *Ye have heard of the patience of Job*, and yet he could not bear to have his integrity queſtioned. It was a brave and a generous ſpeech of his, *Till I dye, I will not remove my integrity from me.* cap. 27. 5.

And yet it hath ſo happened, that *this* is become a very common doubt among religious people; and they have been ſo unreaſon-

unreasonably cherished in it, as to have it made a considerable evidence of a mans sincerity, to doubt of it himself. It is indeed said in Scripture, *Jer.* 17. 9, *That the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?* which is true concerning our future intentions and actions; no man knowing how his mind may change hereafter. Little did *Hazael* think that ever he should do those things which the Prophet foretold him. But though this be true in it self, yet 'tis not the meaning of that Text. For the Prophet in that *chapter* plainly makes use of this consideration of the falshood and deceitfulness of mans heart, as an argument to take off the people of *Israel* from *trusting in the arm of flesh*, and in those promises which were made to them of forreign assistance from *Egypt*: Because men may pretend fair, and yet deceive those that rely upon them; for *the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked*, and none but God knows whether mens inward intentions be answerable to their outward professions; for *he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins.* And this I verily believe, is all that the *Prophet* here intends, That there is a great deal of fraud and deceit in the hearts of bad

men, ſo that no man can rely upon their promiſes and profeſſions; but God knows the hearts of all men. But now becauſe God alone knows the hearts of all men, and the ſincerity of their intentions towards one another, doth it from hence follow that it is a thing either impoſſible or very difficult for any man to know the ſincerity of his own preſent intentions and actions? To make any ſuch concluſion, were to *condemn the generation of Gods children*, thoſe holy and excellent men in Scripture, *Job*, and *David*, and *Hezekiah*, and St. *Paul*, who do ſo frequently appeal to God concerning their own integrity. And ſurely when the *Apoſtle* ſaith, *No man knows the things of a man, but the ſpirit of a man which is in him*, he plainly ſuppoſes that every man is conſcious to the motions and intentions of his own mind. I have inſiſted the longer upon this, that I might from the very foundation deſtroy an imagination, which is not only untrue in it ſelf, but has likewiſe been a very great hindrance to the peace and comfort of many good men.

III. Let us enquire whence it comes to paſs, that notwithſtanding this, ſo many perſons are at ſo great uncertainty about their ſpiritual condition. For the clear-

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ing of this matter, we will diſtinctly conſider theſe three things. *Firſt*, The grounds of the falſe hopes and confidence of men really bad, concerning their good condition. *Secondly*, The cauſeleſs doubts and jealouſies of men really good concerning their bad condition. And *thirdly*, The juſt cauſes of doubting in others. As for the troubles and fears of men who are notoriouſly bad, and live in the Practice of known vices, theſe do not fall under our conſideration: If they be troubled about their condition, it is no more than what they ought to be; and if they be only doubtful of it, it is leſs than they ought to be. To perſons in this condition there is only counſel to be given, to leave their ſins and become better; but no comfort to be adminiſtred to them, till firſt they have followed that counſel: For till they reform, if they think themſelves to be in a bad condition, they think juſt as they ought, and as there is great reaſon; and no body ſhould go about to perſwade them otherwiſe.

Firſt then, we will conſider the grounds of the falſe hopes and confidence of men really bad concerning their good condition. I do not now mean theworſt of men, but ſuch as make ſome ſhew and appearance

ance of goodneſs. It is very unpleaſing to men to fall under the hard opinion and cenſure of others, but the moſt grievous thing in the world for a man to be condemned by himſelf; and therefore it is no wonder that men uſe all manner of ſhifts to avoid ſo great an inconvenience as is the ill opinion of a mans ſelf concerning himſelf and his own condition.

Some therefore rely upon the profeſſion of the Chriſtian Faith, and their being baptized into it. But this is ſo far from being any exemption from a good life, that it is the greateſt and moſt ſolemn obligation to it. Doſt thou believe the Doctrine of the Goſpel? thou of all men art inexcuſable if thou alloweſt thy ſelf in ungodlineſs and worldly luſts.

Others truſt to their external Devotion, they frequent the Church and ſerve God conſtantly, they pray to him, and hear his word, and receive the bleſſed Sacrament: But let us not deceive our ſelves, God is not mocked. All this is ſo far from making amends for the impiety of our lives, that on the contrary, the impiety of our lives ſpoils all the acceptance of our devotions. *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law (that*

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is, from obeying it) *even his prayer ſhall be an abomination.*

Others who are ſenſible they are very bad, depend very much upon their repentance, eſpecially if they ſet ſolemn times apart for it. And there is no doubt but that a ſincere repentance will put a man into a good condition: But then it is to be conſidered, that no repentance is ſincere but that which produceth a real change and reformation in our lives. For we have not repented to purpoſe, if we return again to our ſins. It is well thou art in ſome meaſure ſenſible of thy miſcarriage, but thou art never ſafe till thou haſt forſaken thy ſins; thy eſtate and condition towards God is not chang'd, till thou haſt really alter'd thy ſelf and the courſe of thy life.

Others ſatisfie themſelves with the exerciſe of ſome particular graces and vertues, Juſtice, and Liberallity, and Charity. And is it not a thouſand pities that thy life is not all of a peice, and that all the other parts of it are not anſwerable to theſe; that thou ſhouldeſt loſe the reward of ſo much real goodneſs, out of thy fondneſs to any one vice or luſt; that when *thou art not far from the Kingdom of God*, for *lack* of one or two things more

more thou ſhouldſt fall ſhort of it? Haſt thou never heard what the Scripture ſaith, that *he who offends in one point is a transgreſſour of the whole Law?* To make a man a good man, all parts of goodneſs muſt concur, but any one way of wickedneſs is ſufficient to denominate a man bad.

Laſtly, Some, who are very careful of their outward carriage and converſation, but yet are conſcious to themſelves of great ſecret faults and vices, when they can find no comfort from themſelves, and the teſtimony of their own conſciences, are apt to comfort themſelves in the good opinion which perhaps others have of them. But if we know our ſelves to be bad, and *our own hearts do condemn us*; it is not the good opinion of others concerning us which can either alter or better our condition. They may have reaſon for their charity, and yet thou none for thy confidence. Truſt no body concerning thy ſelf rather than thy ſelf, becauſe no body can know thee ſo well as thou mayeſt know thy ſelf.

Theſe, and ſuch as theſe, are the hopes of the hypocrite, which *Job* elegantly compares to *the ſpiders web*, finely and artificially wrought, but miſerably thin and weak; ſo that we our ſelves may ſee through

through them, and if we lay the least stress upon them they will break. They are but pleasant dreams and delusions, which whenever we are awaken'd to a serious consideration of our condition by apprehensions of approaching death and judgment, will presently vanish and disappear; so the same *holy man* tells us, *Job* 27. 8, *What is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his Soul?*

Secondly, We will consider in the next place the causeless doubts and jealousies of men really good, concerning their bad condition. For as some are prone beyond all reason to delude themselves with vain hopes of their good condition, so others are apt as unreasonably to torment themselves with groundless fears and jealousies that their estate is bad. And of these doubts there are several occasions, the chief whereof I shall mention, by which we may judg of the rest that are of the like nature.

1. Some are afraid that they are reprobated from all eternity, and therefore they cannot be the *children of God*. This is so unreasonable, that if it were not a real cause of trouble to some persons, it did not deserve to be considered. For no man that sincerely endeavours to please God

God and to keep his commandments, hath from Scripture the leaſt ground to ſuſpect any latent or ſecret decree of God againſt him, that ſhall work his ruin. But whatever the decrees of God be concerning the eternal ſtate of men, ſince they are ſecret to us, they can certainly be no rule either of our duty or comfort. And no man hath reaſon to think himſelf rejected of God, either from eternity, or in time, that does not find the marks of Reprobation in himſelf, I mean an evil heart and life. By this indeed a man may know that he is out of Gods favour for the preſent, but he hath no reaſon at all, from hence to conclude that God hath from all eternity and for ever caſt him off. That God calls him to repentance, and affords to him the ſpace and means of it, is a much plainer ſign that God is willing and ready to have mercy on him, than any thing elſe is, or can be, that God hath utterly caſt him off. And therefore for men to judg of their condition by the decrees of God which are hid from us, and not by his word which is *near us and in our hearts*, is as if a man wandring in the wide ſea, in a dark night when the heaven is all clouded about him, ſhould yet reſolve to

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ſteer his courſe by the ſtars, which he cannot ſee, but only gueſs at; and neglect the Compaſs, which is at hand and would afford him a much better and more certain direction. This therefore is to be rejected as a fond and groundleſs imagination, and which ought to trouble no body, becauſe no body doth, nor can know any thing concerning it. *Moſes* hath long ſince very well determin'd this matter, *Deut.* 29. 29, *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but thoſe things which are revealed, unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this Law.*

2. Good men are conſcious to themſelves of many frailties and imperfections, and therefore they are afraid of their condition. But God conſiders the infirmities of our preſent ſtate, and expects no other obedience from us, in order to our acceptance with him, but what this ſtate of imperfection is capable of: And provided the ſincere endeavour and general courſe of our lives be to pleaſe him and keep his Commandments, the terms of the Goſpel are ſo merciful, that our frailties ſhall not be imputed to us, ſo as to affect our main ſtate, and to make us ceaſe to be the children of God. And

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though we may be guilty of many errours and ſecret ſins which eſcape our notice and obſervation, yet is it not impoſſible for us to exerciſe ſuch a repentance for theſe as will be available for their pardon. For we have to deal with a merciful God, who is pleaſed to accept of ſuch an obedience and of ſuch a repentance as we are capable of performing. Now there is a great difference between thoſe ſins which require a particular repentance before we can hope for the pardon of them, (as all great and deliberate and preſumptuous ſins do, which are never committed without our knowledg, and are ſo far from ſlipping out of our memory, that they are continually flying in our faces, and we cannot forget them if we would) and ſins of infirmity occaſion'd by ſurpriſe and violence of temptation, through ignorance or inadvertency: For a general repentance ſuch as we every day exerciſe in our devotions and prayers to God, may ſuffice for theſe. I ſpeak not this to hinder any from a more particular repentance of all their known failings, the more particular the better; but to remove the groundleſs fears and jealouſies of men about their main eſtate and condition. And if any ask, how I know that a general repentance

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will suffice for these kind of sins; I answer, Because more than this in many cases is impossible; so that either we must rest satisfied that God will forgive them upon these terms, or conclude that they shall not be forgiven at all, which is contrary to the whole tenour of the Scriptures: I say, in many cases, more than this is impossible, because sins of ignorance, and those common errours and frailties of humane life, which *David* calls *secret sins*, are not particularly known to us when they are committed, and consequently it is impossible that we should particularly repent of them. And therefore in this case there can be no doubt but that God doth accept of a general repentance, as he did from *David* when he made that humble confession and prayer to him, *Psal.* 19. 12, *Who can understand his errours? cleanse thou me from secret sins.*

3. They are afraid their obedience is not sincere, because it proceeds many times from fear, and not always out of pure love to God. For answer to this: It is plain from Scripture, that God propounds to men several motives and arguments to obedience; some proper to work upon their *fear*, as the threatnings of punishment; some upon their *hope*, as the pro-

miſes of bleſſing and reward; others upon their *love*, as the mercies and forgiveneſs of God. From whence it is evident he intended they ſhould all work upon us. And accordingly the Scripture gives us inſtances in each kind. *Noah moved with fear* obeyed God in *preparing an Ark: Moſes had reſpect unto the recompence of reward: Mary Magdalen loved much.* And as it is hard to ſay, ſo it is not neceſſary to determine juſt how much influence and no more each of theſe hath upon us: It is very well if men be reclaimed from their ſins and made good, by the joynt force of all the conſiderations which God offers to us. To be ſure, Love is the nobleſt and moſt generous principle of obedience, but fear commonly takes the firſt and faſteſt hold of us, and in times of violent temptation is perhaps the beſt argument to keep, even the beſt of men, within the bounds of their duty.

4. Another cauſe of doubting in good men is, from a ſenſe of their imperfect performance of the duties of Religion, and of the abatement of their affections towards God at ſome times. They have many wandring thoughts in prayer and other exerciſes of devotion, and they cannot for their life keep their minds continually

tinually intent on what they are about. This we ſhould ſtrive againſt as much as we can, and that is the utmoſt we can do; but to cure this wholly is impoſſible, the infirmity of our nature and the frame of our minds will not admit of it: And therefore no man ought to queſtion his ſincerity, becauſe he cannot do that which is impoſſible for men to do.

And then for the abatement of our affections to God and Religion at ſome times, this naturally proceeds from the inconſtancy of mens tempers, by reaſon of which it is not poſſible that the beſt of men ſhould be able always to maintain and keep up the ſame degree of zeal and fervour towards God. But our comfort is, that God doth not meaſure mens ſincerity by the Tides of their affections, but by the conſtant bent of their reſolutions, and the general tenour of their life and actions.

5. Another cauſe of theſe doubts is, that men expect more than ordinary and reaſonable aſſurance of their good condition; ſome particular revelation from God, and extraordinary impreſſion upon their minds, to that purpoſe, which they think the Scripture means by the *teſtimony* and *ſeal* and *earneſt of the Spirit*. God

may give this when, and to whom he pleases; but I do not find he hath any where promised it. And all that the Scripture means by those phrases of the *testimony*, and *seal*, and *earnest of the Spirit*, is to my apprehension no more but this, That the Holy Spirit which God bestowed upon Christians in so powerful and sensible a manner, was a *seal* and *earnest* of their resurrection to eternal life, according to that plain Text, *Rom.* 8. 11, *If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* But then, who they are that have the Spirit of God, is only to be known by the real fruits and effects of it. If we be *led by the Spirit*, and *walk in the Spirit*, and *do not fulfil the lusts of the flesh*, then *the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in us.* But this is very far from an immediate and extraordinary revelation from the Spirit of God to the minds of good men, telling them in particular that they are the children of God. I know not what peculiar favour God may shew to some, but I know no such thing, nor ever yet met with any wise and good man that did affirm it of himself: And I fear that in

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moſt of thoſe who preten d to it, it is either meer fancy or groſs deluſion.

6. As for the caſe of *melancholy*, it is not a reaſonable caſe, and therefore doth not fall under any certain rules and directions. They who are under the power of it, are ſeldom fit to take that counſel which alone is fit to be given them; and *that* is, not to believe themſelves concering themſelves, but to truſt the judgment of others rather than their own apprehenſions. In other caſes every man knows himſelf beſt, but a melancholy man is moſt in the dark as to himſelf. This cauſe of trouble and doubting is very much to be pitied, but hard to be removed, unleſs by phyſick, or by time, or by chance. One may happen to ſay ſomething that may hit the humour of a melancholy man, and ſatisfie him for the preſent; but Reaſon muſt needs ſignifie very little to thoſe perſons, the nature of whoſe diſtemper it is to turn every thing that can be ſaid for their comfort into objections againſt themſelves.

Thirdly, But beſides thoſe who miſtake their condition, either by preſuming it to be better, or fearing it to be worſe than it is; there are likewiſe others who upon good grounds are doubtful of their con-

dition, and have reaſon to be afraid of it: Thoſe I mean, who have ſome beginnings of goodneſs, which yet are very imperfect: They have good reſolutions, and do many things well; but they often fall, and are frequently pull'd back by thoſe evil inclinations and habits which are yet in a great meaſure unſubdued in them. Theſe I cannot liken better than to the *Borderers* between two Countries, who live in the marches and confines of two powerful Kingdoms, both which have a great influence upon them, ſo that it is hard to ſay whoſe ſubjects they are, and to which Prince they belong: Thus it is with many in Religion, They have pious inclinations, and have made ſome fair attempts towards goodneſs; they have begun to refrain from ſin, and to reſiſt the occaſions and temptations to it; but ever and anon they are maſtered by their old luſts, and carryed off from their beſt reſolutions; and perhaps upon a little conſideration they repent and recover themſelves again, and after a while are again entangled and overcome.

Now the caſe of theſe perſons is really doubtful, both to themſelves and others. And the proper direction to be given them, in order to their peace and ſettlement,

ment, is by all means to encourage them to go on and fortifie their good resolutions; to be more vigilant and watchful over themselves, to strive against sin, and to resist it with all their might. And according to the success of their endeavours in this conflict, the evidence of their good condition will every day clear up and become more manifest: The more we grow in grace, and the seldomer we fall into sin, and the more even and constant our obedience to God is, so much the greater and fuller satisfaction we shall have of our good estate towards God: For *the path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day*: And *the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.*

I shall only make two or three Inferences from what hath been discoursed upon this Argument, and so conclude.

1. From hence we learn the great danger of sins of omission as well as Commission; *Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.* The meer neglect of any of the great duties of Religion, of piety towards God, and of kindness andcharity to men, though we be free from the com-

mission of great sins, is enough to cast us out of the favour of God, and to shut us for ever out of his kingdom; *I was hungry and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink, sick and in prison and ye visited me not, therefore depart ye cursed.*

2. It is evident from what hath been said, That nothing can be vainer than for men to live in any course of sin and impiety, and yet to pretend to be the Children of God, and to hope for eternal life. The Children of God will do the works of God, and whoever hopes to enjoy him hereafter will endeavour to be like him here; *Every man that hath this hope in Him, purifies himself, even as He is pure.*

3. You see what is the great mark and character of a mans good or bad condition; *whosoever doth righteousness is of God, and whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.* Here is a plain and sensible evidence by which every man that will deal honestly with himself may certainly know his own condition; and then according as he finds it to be, may take comfort in it, or make hast out of it. And we need not ascend into heaven nor go down into

into the deep, to ſearch out the ſecret counſels and decrees of God; there needs no anxious enquiry whether we be of the number of Gods elect: If we daily mortifie our luſts, and grow in goodneſs, and take care to add to our faith and knowledg, temperance and patience and charity, and all other Chriſtian graces and vertues, we certainly take the beſt courſe in the world to *make our calling and election ſure.* And without this, it is impoſſible that we ſhould have any comfortable and well grounded aſſurance of our good condition. This one mark of *doing righteouſneſs* is that into which all other ſigns and characters, which are in Scripture given of a good man, are finally reſolved: And this anſwers all thoſe various phraſes, which ſome men would make to be ſo many ſeveral and diſtinct marks of a *child of God*; As whether we have the true knowledg of God and divine illumination, for *hereby we know that we know him if we keep his commandments:* Whether we ſincerely love God, for *this is the love of God that we keep his commaudments:* And whether God loves us, for *the righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, and his*

his countenance will behold the upright: Whether we be regenerate and born of God, for *whosoever is born of God sinneth not:* Whether we have *the Spirit of God witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God*, for *as many as have the Spirit of God are led by the Spirit*, and *by the Spirit do mortifie the deeds of the flesh:* Whether we belong to Christ, and have an interest in him or not, for *they that are Christs have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof:* In a word, Whether the promise of heaven and eternal life belong to us, for *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, but if we *have our fruits unto holiness, the end* will be *everlasting life.* So that you see at last, the Scripture brings all to this one mark, *viz.* holiness and obedience to the Laws of God, or a vicious and wicked life; *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.*

Let us then deal impartially with our selves, and bring our lives and actions to this tryal; and never be at rest till the matter be brought to some issue, and we have made a deliberate judgment

ment of our condition, whether we be *the children of God* or not. And if upon a full and fair examination, our consciences give us this testimony, that by the grace of God we have *denyed ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and have *lived soberly and righteously and godly in this present world*, we may take joy and comfort in it; for *if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidenee towards God:* But if upon the search and tryal of our ways our case appear clearly to be otherwise, or if we have just cause to doubt of it, let us not venture to continue one moment longer in so uncertain and dangerous a condition. And if we desire to know the way of Peace, the Scripture hath set it plainly before us, *Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well: Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* Though our case be veay bad, yet it is not desperate; *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all men*

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to be embraced, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners: And he is still willing to save us, if we be but willing to leave our sins, and to serve him in holiness and righteousness the remaining part of our lives. We may yet be *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God:* We who have ventured so long upon the brink of ruin, may yet by the infinite mercies of God, and by the power of his grace, be rescu'd from the base and miserable slavery of the Devil and our lusts, *into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.*

And thus I have endeavoured, with all the plainness I could, to represent every man to himself, and to let him clearly see what his condition is towards God, and how the case of his soul and of his eternal happiness stands. And I do verily believe that what I have said in this matter is the truth of God, to which we ought all gladly to yield and render up our selves. For *great is Truth, and mighty above all things:* She is faithful and impartial in her counsels, and though she be not always welcome, yet 'tis always wise to hearken to her, for in great kindness and charity she lets men know their condition and the danger of it, that they may take

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care to prevent it: *With her is no accepting of persons, and in her judgments there is no unrighteousness.* I will conclude all with that excellent advice of a Heathen Philosopher, *Make it no longer a matter of dispute what are the marks and signs of a good man, but immediately set about it, and endeavour to become such an one.*

Antonin. lib. 10.

Luke XV. 7.

I ſay unto you, that likewiſe joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons which need no repentance.

AFTER many attempts made in vain, to reclaim ſinners from their evil ways, and to bring them to the wiſdom of the juſt, it is hard for us who are the meſſengers of God to men, not to ſit down in deſpondence, and at laſt quite to deſpair of doing good upon them. But when I conſider the infinite patience of God with ſinners, and how long *his ſpirit ſtrives with them*; why ſhould we, *we* who are ſinners our ſelves, think much to bear with ſinners, and patiently to contend with their obſtinacy and perverſeneſs? When I con-

I consider that our blessed *Saviour*, the great Preacher and Pattern of righteousness, did not give over the worst of men, nor despair of their recovery: this methinks should make us, who are *Ambassadours for Christ*, unwearied in *beseeching men in his stead to be reconciled to God.*

And of this we have a famous instance in this *Chapter:* The Publicans and sinners, as they had done several times before, came to hear our Saviour: He treated them very kindly, and conversed familiarly with them; at this the Pharisees were displeased, and murmured, and this unreasonable murmuring of theirs gave occasion to the three *Parables* in this *Chapter.*

In which our Saviour does at once answer the objection of the Pharisees, and give all possible encouragement to the repentance of these great sinners. He answers the Pharisees, by letting them plainly see that he was about the best work in the world, the most acceptable to God, and matter of greatest joy to all the heavenly inhabitants. Instead of a severe reproof of their uncharitableness, he offers that calmly to their consideration which ought in all reason to convince them, that he was no ways to blame for this

this familiar converſation of his with ſinners; having no other deſign upon them but to reclaim them from their vices, and to make them fit company for the beſt of men; that he was a ſpiritual Phyſician, and therefore his proper work and employment lay among his Patients. And then, inſtead of terrifying theſe ſinners, who ſeemed to come with a good mind to be inſtructed by him, he gently inſinuates the moſt winning arguments and the greateſt encouragements to repentance, by ſhewing how ready God was, after all their ſins and provocations, to receive them to his grace and favour, provided they did ſincerely repent and betake themſelves to a better courſe: And not only ſo, but that the repentance of a ſinner is great joy to the great King of the world, and to all that holy and heavenly hoſt that attend upon him.

From which method of our Saviour, in treating ſo great ſinners ſo gently, I cannot but make this obſervation, for my own uſe, as well as for others; That it is good to give, even the greateſt of ſinners, all the encouragement we can to repentance; and though men have been never ſo bad, yet if they have but this one good quality left in them, that they are

patient to be instructed, and content to hear good counsel, we should use them kindly, and endeavour to recover them by the fairest means; not so much upbraiding them for their having been bad, as encouraging them to become better.

To this purpose our Saviour uttered *three* Parables; of *the recovery of a lost sheep*; of *finding a lost piece of money* of *the return of a prodigal son to his father*; and though they all aim at the same scope and design, yet our Saviour useth this variety, not only to convey the same thing to several capacities in a more acceptable manner, one similitude happening to hit one person, and another another; but likewise to inculcate so weighty a matter the more upon his hearers, and to fix it more deeply in their minds.

The words which I have read are the Moral or Application of the first *Parable*, concerning a man who had an hundred sheep, and having lost one, leaves the ninety and nine to go to seek that which was lost; and having found it, with great joy brings it home. By which our Saviour gives us to understand, what joy God, and the blessed Spirits above,

bove, take in the conversion of a sinner. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.* Than which nothing could have been more proper, both to silence the uncharitable murmuring of the Pharisees against our Saviour, for conversing with publicans and sinners to so good an end; and likewise to encourage sinners to repent: For why should the Pharisees be displeased at that, which was so great a pleasure to God and the holy Angels; and what greater encouragement to repentance than this, that God is not only willing to receive the returning sinner, but that the news of his repentance is entertained in heaven with so much joy, that if it be possible for the blessed Inhabitants of that place to have any thing added to their happiness, this will be a new accession to it?

There are *three* things in the words which require a very careful explication.

1. How we are to understand the *joy* that is *in heaven* at the conversion of a sinner?

2. Who are here meant by the *just*

Persons that need no repentance?

3. With what reason it is here said, that there is *more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance?*

There is something of difficulty in each of these, which deserves our heedful and attentive consideration.

I. How we are to understand the *joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a sinner?* And this (as indeed this whole passage of our Saviours) we are not to understand too strictly and rigorously, but as spoken in a great measure after the manner of men, and by way of accommodation to our capacity, so far as the persons here spoken of are capable of any addition to their joy and happiness.

As it refers *to God*, it seems very inconsistent with the happiness and perfection of the Divine nature to suppose Him really capable of joy, any more than of grief or any other passion. Because this would be to imagine some new accession to his pleasure and happiness, which being always infinite, can never have any thing added to it. And therefore we are

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to underſtand this, as it relates to God, in the ſame manner as we do infinite other paſſages of Scripture, where humane paſſions are aſcribed to him, to be ſpoken by way of condeſcenſion, and after the language and manner of the ſons of men; and to ſignifie only thus much to us, that the converſion of a ſinner is a thing highly pleaſing and acceptable to God.

As it refers to *Angels* and other *bleſſed Spirits*, I ſee no inconvenience why it may not be underſtood more ſtrictly and literally; that they conceive a new joy at the news of a ſinners repentance, and find a freſh pleaſure and delight ſpringing up in their minds whenever they hear the joyful tydings of a ſinner reſcued from the ſlavery of the Devil, and the danger of eternal damnation; of a new member added to the Kingdom of God, that ſhall be a companion and ſharer with them in that bleſſedneſs which they enjoy. There ſeems to me to be nothing in this repugnant to the nature and happineſs of bleſſed Spirits in another world. For it is certain, that there are degrees of happineſs among the bleſſed: From whence it neceſſarily follows, that ſome of them may be happier than they are. And it is very probable, ſince the happineſs of An-

gels and good men is but finite, that those who are most happy do continually receive new additions to their blessedness; and that their felicity is never at a stand but perpetually growing and improving to all eternity; and that as their knowledg and love do encrease, so likewise the capacity and causes of their happiness are still more and more enlarged and augmented: So that it is reasonable enough to suppose, that there is really joy among the Angels and Spirits of just men made perfect, over every sinner that repenteth.

II. Who are here meant by the *just persons who need no repentance?* That our Saviour in this expression gives some glance and reflection upon the *Pharisees* (who prided themselves in their own righteousness; and instead of confessing their sins to God, stood upon their own justification, as if they needed no repentance) is very probable; because this *Parable* was designed to answer their murmurings against him, for conversing with publicans and sinners; and by the by to give a check to those who were so conceited of their own righteousness, as if they had no need of repentance. And

this is very ſuitable to what our Saviour elſewhere ſays to them upon the like occaſion, that *the whole have no need of the Phyſician, but the ſick*; that *he came not to call the righteous, but the ſinners to repentance.* But yet though our Saviour expreſſeth himſelf ſo as that the Phariſees might with reaſon enough apply it to themſelves, that there was more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine of *them*, who were ſo conceited of their own righteouſneſs, that they thought they had no need of repentance (for indeed our Saviour delivers himſelf ſo, as to leave room for ſuch a ſevere application) yet I think there is little doubt to be made but that he intended ſomething further; and that ſuppoſing the Phariſees were as juſt as they pretended, and were really righteous men, ſo as to ſtand in no need of ſuch a repentance as great ſinners do, yet our Saviour affirms, *there was more joy in heaven over one penitent ſinner, than over ninety and nine ſuch juſt perſons.*

But are there any perſons in the world ſo juſt, as abſolutely to ſtand in need of no repentance? No, there was never any ſuch perſon in the world, him only excepted who ſaid this, our bleſſed

Saviour, *who had no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* And therefore this phraſe of *needing no repentance*, is to be underſtood in a qualified ſenſe, and with ſome allowance; otherwiſe our bleſſed Saviour had ſuppoſed a caſe which never was, of a great number of perfectly righteous men. And our Saviours meaning in this is ſufficiently explained in the laſt Parable of this Chapter, concerning the *Prodigal Son*; Where the prodigal ſon is the *ſinner that repented*; and his elder brother, who had always obſerved and obeyed his father, he is the *juſt perſon who needed no repentance.* So that by him our Saviour plainly deſigns thoſe who being religiouſly educated and brought up in the fear of God, had never broke out into any extravagant and vicious courſe of life, and ſo in ſome ſenſe had no need of repentance, that is, of changing the whole courſe of their lives, as the prodigal ſon had. Notbut that the beſt of men are guilty of many faults and infirmities, which they have too much cauſe to repent of, as our Saviour ſufficiently intimates in that *Parable:* For certainly it was no ſmall infirmity in the elder brother, to be ſo envious and to take ſo heinouſly the joyful welcome and entertainment

ment which his prodigal brother at his return found from his father: But yet this single fault and sudden surprize of passion considering the constant duty which he had paid to his father throughout the course of his life, did not make him such a sinner as to need such a repentance as his brother did, which consisted in a perfect change of the whole course of his life. And of such *just persons* as these, and of such a *repentance* as this, it seems very plain that our Saviour intended this discourse.

III. But the main difficulty of all is, with what reason it is here said that *there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance?* Is it not better not to offend, than to sin and repent? Is not innocence better than amendment, and the wisdom of prevention to be preferred before that of remedy? Is it worth the while to do amiss to make way for repentance; and is not this almost like *sinning that grace may abound?* And if repentance be not better than righteousness, why is there more joy in heaven over the penitent than over the righteous; nay, over one penitent sinner, than over ninety and nine just persons?

ſons? Do not the bleſſed always rejoyce moſt in that which is really beſt? Here is the difficulty; and it requires ſome care and conſideration clearly to remove it. In order to which be pleaſed to conſider theſe *three* things; which I think to be very material to the clearing of it.

1. That the ſame thing, conſidered in ſeveral reſpects, may in ſome reſpects have the advantage of another thing, and for thoſe reaſons be preferred before it, and yet not have the advantage of it abſolutely and in all reſpects. Moral compariſons are not to be exacted to a Mathematical ſtrictneſs and rigour. To this purpoſe I have obſerv'd in a former diſcourſe, that it was long ſince judiciouſly noted by *Ariſtotle*, "That moral and proverbi-"al ſpeeches are not to be taken too ſtrict-"ly, as if they were univerſally true, and "in all caſes: It is ſufficient if they be true for the moſt part, and in ſeveral reſpects which are very conſiderable. And of this nature are moſt of the *Proverbs* of *Solomon*; and whoſoever ſhall go about to make out the truth of them in all caſes, does in my opinion take a very hard task upon himſelf. But which is nearer to my purpoſe, our Saviour himſelf in the Chapter before my Text, and

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in the moral application of a Parable too, (namely that of the *unjust steward*) useth a proverbial speech just in the same manner; *The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light:* Which is only a wise observation that is generally true, and in many respects, but not absolutely, and universally. For some men have been as wise and diligent for the glory of God and interest of their souls, as ever any man was for this world, and for the advancement of his temporal interest. Of the like nature is this saying used by our Saviour, probably taken (as our Saviour did many other proverbial speeches) from the *Jews*, and applied to his own purpose. For there are several sayings of the *Jewish* Masters much to this purpose: As, *Great is the dignity of penitents; Great is the vertue of them that repent, so that no creature may stand in their rank and order.* And again, *The righteous may not stand in the same place with those that have repented.* These I confess were very high sayings, but yet very well designed for the encouragement of repentance. And they are not without good reason, as will appear if we consider these *two* things.

First, That the greater the difficulty of

of vertue is, ſo much the greater is the praiſe and commendation of it: And not only we our ſelves take the more joy and comfort in it, but it is more admirable and delightful to others. Now it cannot be denyed to be much more difficult to break off a vicious habit, than to go on in a good way, which we have been trained up in and always accuſtomed to. Thoſe that have been well educated have great cauſe to thank God, and to accknowledg the care of their Parents and Teachers: For piety and goodneſs are almoſt infinitely eaſier to ſuch perſons, than to thoſe who have wanted this advantage. It is happy for them they never taſted of unlawful pleaſures; if they had, they would poſſibly have drank as deep as others: It is well they were never entangled in a ſinful courſe, nor enſlaved to vicious habits, nor *hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*; if they had, they might poſſibly never have been recovered out of the ſnare of the Devil. By the happineſs of a good education, and the merciful providence of God, a great part of many mens vertue conſiſts in their ignorance of vice, and their being kept out of the way of great and dangerous temptations; rather in the good cuſtoms they have been

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bred up to, than in the deliberate choice of their wills; and rather in the happy preventions of evil, than their resolute constancy in that which is good. And God, who knows what is in man, and sees to the bottom of every man's temper and inclination, knows how far this man would have fallen, had he had the temptations of other men; and how irrecoverably perhaps, he would have been plunged in an evil course, had he once entered upon it. So that repentance is a very great thing; and though it be the most just, and fit, and reasonable thing in the world, yet for all that, it deserves great commendation, because it is for the most part so very hard and difficult. And therefore, though absolutely speaking, innocence is better than repentance; yet, as the circumstances may be, the vertue of some penitents may be greater than of many just and righteous persons.

Secondly, There is this consideration further to recommeud repentance, that they who are reclaimed from a wicked course, are many times more thoroughly and zealously good afterwards: Their trouble and remorse for their sins does quicken and spur them on in the ways of

of vertue and goodneſs; and a lively ſenſe of their paſt errors is apt to make them more careful and conſcientious of their duty, more tender and fearful of offending God, and deſirous, if it were poſſible, to redeem their former miſcarriages by their good behaviour for the future. Their love to God is uſually more vehement, and burns with a brighter flame; *for to whomſoever much is forgiven, they will love much:* And they are commonly more zealous for the converſion of others, as being more ſenſible of the danger ſinners are in, and more apt to commiſerate their caſe, remembring that it was once their own condition, and with what difficulty they were reſcued from ſo great a danger. And for the moſt part great penitents are more free from pride and contempt of others, the conſiederation of what themſelves once were, being enough to keep them humble all their days. So that penitents are many times more throughly and perfectly good, and after their recovery do in ſeveral reſpects outſtrip and excel thoſe who were never engaged in a vicious courſe of life: As a broken bone that is well ſet, is ſometimes ſtronger than it was before.

2. It

2. It will conduce alſo very much to the extenuating of this difficulty, to conſider that our Saviour does not here compare repentance with abſolute innocence and perfect righteoufneſs, but with the imperfect obedience of good men, who are guilty of many ſins and infirmities; but yet upon accouut of the general courſe and tenour of their lives are, by the mercy and favour of the Goſpel, eſteemed juſt and righteous perſons, and for the merits and perfect obedience of our bleſſed Saviour ſo accepted by God. Now this alters the caſe very much, and brings the penitent and this ſort of righteous perſons much nearer to one another: ſo that in comparing them together, the true penitent may in ſome caſes, and in ſome reſpects, have the advantage of the righteous, and deſerve upon ſome accounts to be prefer'd before him.

3. Which is principally to be conſidered for the full clearing of this difficulty; this paſſage of our Saviours is to be underſtood as ſpoken very much after the manner of men, and ſuitably to the nature of humane paſſions, and the uſual occaſions of moving them. We are apt to be exceedingly affected with the obtaining of what we did not hope for, and much more

more with the regaining of what we looked upon as loſt and deſperate. Whatever be the reaſon of it, ſuch is the nature of man, that we are not ſo ſenſibly moved at the continuance of a good which we have long poſſeſt, as at the recovery of it after it was loſt and gone from us. And the reaſons of a judicious value and eſteem of a ſettled pleaſure and contentment are one thing, and the cauſes of ſudden joy and tranſport another. A continued courſe of goodneſs may in it ſelf be more valuable, and yet repentance after a great fall and long wandrings may be much more moving and ſurprizing. For where things are conſtant and keep in the ſame tenour, they are not apt in their nature to give any new and ſudden occaſion of joy. And this is the reaſon given in the *Parable* of the *Prodigal Son*; where the Father tells his eldeſt Son, who was ſo offended at the joyful reception and wellcome of his prodigal Brother, That *He had been always with him, and all that he had was his*; That is, he was ſenſible of his conſtant duty and obedience, than which nothing could have been more acceptable; and that it had not, nor ſhould not loſe its reward: But the return of his

his other ſon, after he had given over all hopes of him, and looked upon his caſe as deſperate, this was a marvellous ſurpriſe, and a happineſs beyond expectation; which is the proper and natural cauſe of joy and gladneſs: And therefore he tells him, that upon ſuch an occaſion *it was meet that we ſhould make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; was loſt, and is found.* His elder ſons continuance in his duty was the enjoyment of what he had always had; but the return of his prodigal ſon was the retrieving of what he had given up for loſt, and a kind of reſurrection from the dead. And thus our bleſſed Saviour to encourage the repentance of ſinners, repreſents God after the manner of men; as if our heavenly father did conceive ſuch a joy upon the repentance of a ſinner, as earthly parents are wont to do upon the return of a wild and extravagant ſon to himſelf and his duty.

Having thus as briefly and clearly as I could explained the ſeveral difficulties in the Text, I ſhall now deduce ſome Inferences from it, and ſo conclude.

1. *Firſt*, That the bleſſed Spirits above have ſome knowledg of the affairs of men

here below, becauſe they are ſaid to rejoyce at the converſion of a ſinner. This is ſpoken more particularly of the *Angels*, as appears by comparing what is more generally ſaid in the Text, that there is joy *in heaven*, with what is more particularly expreſs'd in the 10*th verſe*, that there is joy *in the preſence of the Angels* over one ſinner that repenteth. Now whether the Angels come to this knowledg by vertue of their miniſtry here below, for the good of the Elect; and ſo in their continual entercourſe between heaven and earth, bring to their fellow-ſervants in heaven the joyful news of the repentance of ſinners upon earth: or whether God be pleaſed from time to time to reveal it to them, as a thing extreamly welcom and delightful to good Spirits, and tending to the increaſe of their happineſs; as it is not very material to enquire, ſo perhaps impoſſible for us to determine.

However, it cannot from hence be concluded that the Angels or Saints in Heaven have ſuch an univerſal knowledg of our condition and affairs, as to be a reaſonable ground and warrant to us to pray to them, yea or to deſire them to pray for us; no, though this were done without any ſolemn circumſtances of Invocation.

vocation. For they may very well know ſome things concerning us, wherein their own comfort and happineſs is likewiſe concerned, and yet be ignorant of all the reſt of our affairs. This one thing we are ſure they know, becauſe our Saviour hath told us ſo; but we are ſure of no more. And there is neither equal reaſon for their knowledg of our other concernments, nor is there any revelation in Scripture to that purpoſe.

2. *Secondly*, If God and the bleſſed Sprits above rejoyceat the converſion of a ſinner, ſo ſhould we too: and not fret and murmur as the Phariſees here did. This is the temper of the Devil, and of very bad men, to regret and envy the good and happineſs of others. For it is reaſonable to believe, that proportionably to the *joy* that is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner, is the *grief* and vexation of the Devil and his inſtruments, of evil Spirits and wicked men. And as the Devil delights in deſtroying ſouls and *goes about like a roaring lion, ſeeking whom he may devour*; ſo no doubt he is in great rage, and gnaſheth out of very diſcontent, when at any time he is fruſtrated of his hopes, and the prey, which he thought himſelf ſure of, is ſnatched

out of his jaws. And thus we ſee it is with bad men, they do perſecute thoſe that forſake them and their wicked ways, and refuſe any further to go along with them *to the ſame exceſs of riot.*

And this is no where more viſible than among thoſe of the Church of *Rome.* How full of wrath and indignation are they againſt thoſe who out of pure conviction of the errours and corruptions of their Church come over to Ours? How do they perſecute them with ſlanders and reproaches, and with all the effects of hatred and malice? So that many times they can ſcarce refrain from doing them a real miſchief, even where it is dangerous to themſelves to attempt it: As if they envied them the grace of God, and the opportunity of being ſaved.

I know it is too natural to thoſe of all Communions to be eager and fierce againſt thoſe that deſert them: And yet ſuppoſing they had the truth certainly on their ſide (which they cannot all have) I ſee no great reaſon for this temper and carriage; For why ſhould I caſt away my patience and my charity becauſe another man hath made ſhipwrack of his faith? But I do not remember any where among mankind to have obſerved a more implacable

cable malice, a more ſincere and hearty ill-will, than they of the Church of *Rome* do conſtantly expreſs towards thoſe that forſake them; nay, though they give never ſo modeſt and reaſonable an account of their change, and behave themſelves towards their old friends with all the kindneſs and compaſſion in the world: yet their hatred and indignation againſt them runs ſo high, that one may plainly ſee they would ſooner forgive a man the greateſt ſins that humane nature can be guilty of, and the breach of all the ten Commandments, than this one Crime, of leaving their Church, that is in truth, of growing wiſer and better.

3. *Thirdly*, The conſideration of what hath been ſaid ſhould mightily inflame our zeal, and quicken our induſtry and diligence for the converſion of ſinners. For if the converſion of oneſoul be worth ſo much labour and pains, and matter of ſuch joy to the bleſſed God and good Spirits; what pains ſhould not we take in ſo corrupt and degenerate an Age as this of ours; where impenitent ſinners do ſo much abound, and the juſt are almoſt failed from among the children of men?

Our bleſſed Saviour indeed (according to the extraordinary decency of all his

Parables) puts the caſe very charitably, and lays the ſuppoſition quite on the other ſide: If there were but one ſinner in the world, or but one of an hundred, yet we ſhould very zealouſly intend, and with all our might, the reduction of this one loſt ſheep; and ſhould never be at reſt, till this ſingle wandring ſoul were found and ſaved. But God knows this is not our caſe, but quite otherwiſe: which ſhould quicken our endeavours ſo much the more, and make us beſtir our ſelves to the utmoſt; having always in our minds that admirable ſaying of St. *James*, *he that converteth a ſinner from the errour of his way, ſhall ſave a ſoul from death.* He that konws the value of an immortal ſoul, and how fearful a thing it is to periſh everlaſtingly, can think no pains too much to take to *ſave a ſoul from death.*

4. *Laſtly*, What an argument and encouragement is here to repentance, even to the greateſt of ſinners? They, I am ſure, ſtand moſt in need of it: And though they of all others have the leaſt reaſon to look for mercy, yet they ſhall not be refuſed; though they be like the *Publicans* and *Heathens* among the *Jews*, who were not only reputed, but many

times

times really were the worſt of men; though like the *prodigal ſon* here in the Parable, they have run away from their father, and *waſted their eſtate in* lewd and *riotous courſe*; yet whenever *they come to themſelves*, and are willing to return to their father, to acknowledg their folly and repent of it, he is ready to receive them; nay, much more ready to receive them than they can be to come to him; For when the Prodigal was but coming towards his father, and *was yet afar off*, *the father runs to meet him*, and embraceth him with as much kindneſs as if he had never offended him, and entertains him with more joy than if he had always continued with him.

How does the great God condeſcend to encourage our repentance; repreſenting himſelf and all the bleſſed company of heaven as tranſported with joy at the converſion of a ſinner, and almoſt ſetting a greater value upon repentance than even upon innocence it ſelf? And if our heavenly Father, who hath been ſo infinitely offended, and ſo highly provoked by us beyond all patience, be ſo ready, ſo forward, ſo glad to receive us, and there be no hindrance, no difficulty, no diſcouragement on his part; is it poſſible

after all this, that we can be ſuch fools, and ſuch enemies to our ſelves, as to be backward to our own happineſs! All of us, the beſt of us, have too much cauſe for repentance; and I fear too many of us, ſtand in need of that repentance intended by our Saviour in the Text, which conſiſts in the change of our whole lives.

But I will not upbraid you with your faults; having no deſign to provoke, but only to perſwade men. I leave it to every ones conſcience to tell him, how great a ſinner, how grievous an offender he hath been. God knows we take no pleaſure in mentioning the ſins of men, but only in their amendment; and we would if it were poſſible even without minding them how bad they have been, perſwade and encourage them to be better.

It is but a ſmall conſideration to tell you, how much it would chear and comfort our hearts, and quicken our zeal and induſtry for the ſalvation of ſouls, to ſee ſome fruit of our labours; that all our pains are not loſt, and that all the good counſel that is from hence tendered to you is not like rain falling upon the rocks, and ſhowers upon the ſands.

But

But I have much greater considerations to offer to you; that your Repentance will at once rejoyce the heart of God, and Angels, and men: that it is a returning to a right mind, and the restoring of you to your selves, to the ease and peace of your own consciences, and to a capacity of being everlastingly happy: that it is to take pity upon your selves and your poor immortal souls; and to take due care to prevent that which is to be dreaded above all things, the being miserable for ever: and last of all, That if you will not repent now, the time will certainly come, and that perhaps in this life, when you shall see the greatest need of repentance, and yet perhaps with miserable *Esau find no place for it, though you seek it carefully with tears*; when you *shall cry, Lord, Lord, and the door shall be shut against you; and shall seek to enter, but shall not be able.* To be sure in the other World you shall eternally repent to no purpose; and be continually lamenting your wretched condition without hopes of remedy; For *there shall be weeping and wailing* without effect, without intermission, and without end.

And what cause have we to thank God that this is not yet our case; that we are

yet

yet on this ſide the pit of deſtruction and the gulf of deſpair? O the infinite patience and boundleſs goodneſs of God to ſinners! With what clemency hath he ſpared us, and *ſuffered our manners* thus long? and with what kindneſs and concernment does he ſtill call upon us to leave our ſins and to return to him; as if in ſo doing we ſhould make him happy, and not our ſelves? With what earneſt longings and deſires does he wait and wiſh for our repentance, ſaying, *O that there were ſuch a heart in them! O that they would hearken unto my voice! When ſhall it once be?* Thus God is repreſented in *Scripture* as patiently attending and liſtening what effect his admonitions and counſels, his reproofs and threatnings will have upon ſinners, *Jer.* 8. 6, *I hearkened and I heard, but they ſpake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedneſs, ſaying, what have I done? every one turned to his courſe, as the horſe ruſheth into the battel.*

And is not this our caſe? God hath long waited for our repentance; and once a year we ſolemnly pretend to ſet about it: But many of us hitherto, I fear, inſtead of returning to God, have but more blindly and furiouſly run on in our courſe, *like the horſe that hath no underſtanding*; yea,

yea, in this more brutiſh than the Beaſt that he ruſheth into the battel without any conſideration of death or danger, and deſtroys himſelf without a ſyllogiſm: But we ſinners have Reaſon, and yet are mad; the greateſt part of evil-doers are ſufficiently ſenſible of the danger of their courſe, and convinced that eternal miſery and ruin will be the end of it; and yet, I know not how, they make a ſhift upon one pretence or other to diſcourſe and reaſon themſelves into it.

But becauſe *the word of God is quick and powerful, and ſharper than a two-edged ſword*, and comes with a greater weight and force upon the minds of men than any humane perſwaſion whatſoever; I will conclude all with thoſe ſhort and ſerious counſels and exhortations of God to ſinners by his holy Prophets.

Conſider and ſhew your ſelves men, O ye tranſgreſſors: Be inſtructed, O Jeruſalem, leſt my ſoul depart from thee: ſeek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near: Repent and turn your ſelves from all your tranſgreſſions, ſo iniquity ſhall not be your ruin.

A SER-

Matth. XII. 31, 32.

Wherefore I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men, but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men:

And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word aagainſt the ſon of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: But whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

THE occaſion of theſe words of our bleſſed Saviour was the blaſphemy of the *Phariſees* againſt that divine power by which he wrought his miracles, and particularly did caſt out Devils. Which works of his, though they were

were wrought by the Spirit of God, yet they obſtinately and maliciouſly imputed them to the power of the Devil. Upon which our Saviour takes occaſion to declare the danger of this ſin, which he calls *blaſpheming of the Holy Ghoſt*: and tells them, that this was ſo great a ſin above all others, that it is in a peculiar manner unpardonable. *Wherefore I ſay unto you*, &c.

For the explaining of theſe words, and the nature and unpardonableneſs of this ſin, we will enquire into theſe four things:

Firſt, What is the difference between ſpeaking againſt the Son of Man, and ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt.

Secondly, Wherein the Nature of this ſin or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt doth conſiſt.

Thirdly, In what ſence this ſin is here ſaid to be peculiarly unpardonable. And

Fourthly, Upon what account it is ſo.

1. What is the difference between *ſpeaking againſt the ſon of man and ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt*. The reaſon of this enquiry is, becauſe the Text plainly puts a great difference between them, though it be not obvious to diſcern where it lies. For our Saviours tells us, that

that *whosoever speaks a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost it shall never be forgiven him*: And yet this blasphemy of the Pharisees against the Holy Ghost, was speaking against the Son of man. For to say that he cast out Devils by the power of the Devil, though it was a blaspheming of the Holy Ghost by whose power he wrought these miracles, yet it was likewise a blaspheming of Christ himself; and was in effect to say, that he was no true Prophet, nor did come from God, but was a Magician and Impostor.

For the removing of this difficulty I shall not need to say, as some learned men have done, That by *the son of man* is here to be understood any man, and that our Saviour is not particularly designed by it. That seems very hard, when our Saviour is so frequently in the Gospel called *the Son of man*. And especially when St. *Luke* reciting these words, does immediately before give him this very title, to put the matter out of all doubt, *Luke* 12. 8, 9, 10, *Also I say unto you, whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the Angels of God: But he that denieth*

nieth me before men, shall be denied before the Angels of God. Upon which it follows, *And whosoever shall speak a word against the son of man it shall be forgiven him.* So that in all reason the Son of man is the very same person that had this Title given him in the foregoing words, *viz.* our blessed Saviour. So that I take it for granted, that by speaking against the Son of man, is here meant speaking against Christ: And by speaking against him, as it is opposed to speaking against the Holy Ghost, is meant all those reproaches and contumelies which they cast upon our Saviours person, without reflecting upon that divine power which he testified by his miracles. As, their reproaching him with the meanness of his birth, *Is not this the Carpenters son?* with the place of it (as they supposed) *out of Galilee ariseth no Prophet:* Their reflecting upon his life, saying that he was *a wine-bibber and a glutton, a friend of Publicans and sinners*; with many other calumnies which they maliciously cast upon him.

But by speaking against the Holy Ghost is meant their blaspheming and reproaching that divine power whereby he wrought his miracles: which though it did at last likewise reflect upon our Saviours person,

ſon, yet it was an immediate reflection upon the Holy Ghoſt, and a blaſpheming of him; and therefore it is called ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt by way of diſtinction or oppoſition to the other calumnies which they uſed againſt our Saviour; which were proper blaſphemies and reproaches of his perſon, but not of the Holy Ghoſt alſo, as this was. This ſeems to me to be the true difference here intended by our Saviour between *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man, and ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt.* Let us in the

II. *Second* place, enquire wherein the *Nature* of this ſin or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt doth conſiſt. And the true Nature of this ſin, though it be ſo plainly to be gathered from our Saviours deſcription of it, yet I know not how a great many learned men have made a hard ſhift to miſtake it. Some have made it to be *final Impenitency*, beccauſe that is unpardonable. But why that rather than any thing elſe that is bad ſhould be called a blaſpheming of the Holy Ghoſt, it is hard to give a reaſon. Others have placed the nature of it in *a wilful and malicious oppoſition of the truth:* which though it be a great ſin, and included in the ſin here ſpoken of, or a concomitant

of it; yet is there great reason to believe that this is not all that is here meant by it. Others would have it to consist in a malicious opposition of the Truth, *when men know and are convinced that it is the Truth*; which is a great sin indeed, if ever any man were guilty of it; but it is a great Question whether humane nature be capable of it. And to mention no more, others think it to consist in a renouncing of the truth *for fear of suffering*; which made *Francis Spira* to think that he had committed this sin.

But with all due respect to the judgment of others, I cannot think that any of these is the sin our Saviour here describes. As I shall endeavour plainly to shew, by considering the occasion of our Saviours mentioning of it; the persons upon whom our Saviour chargeth this sin, and upon what account he chargeth them with it.

At the 22 *ver.* of this *Chapter* there was brought to our Saviour *one possessed with a Devil blind and dumb, and he healed him.* Upon this *the people were amazed, and said, is not this the son of David?* that is, the Messias. The Pharisees hearing this, with great bitterness and contempt said, *This fellow doth not cast out Devils but by Beelzebub the Prince of Devils.* Upon

on this our Saviour tepresents to them the unreasonableness of this calumny: and that upon these two considerations: 1st. That it was very unlikely that the Devil should lend him this power to use it against himself. *Every kingdom divided against it self is brought to desolation: and every city or house divided against it self shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, how shall then his kingdom stand?* 2dly, Our Saviour tells them, they might with as much reason attribute all miracles to the Devil. There were those among themselves who cast out Devils in the name of the God of *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob* (as *Origen*, and *Tertullian*, and *Justin Martyr* tell us). Of these our Saviour speaks, and asks the Pharisees, *by what power they cast them out.* But they acknowledged that these did it by the power of God: and there was no cause but their malice, why they should not have acknowledged that he did it likewise by the same power, *ver.* 27, *If I by Beelzebub cast out Devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.* That is, this may be sufficient to convince you of malice to me: *But if I cast out Devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you*; That

is, the Messias is come: Because he wrought these and other miracles to prove that he was the Messias. And then it follows, *Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.*

So that the *Pharisees* are the persons charged with this sin or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. And their blasphemy was plainly this, that when he cast out Devils by the Spirit of God, they said he did it by the power of the Devil: they maliciously ascribed these works of the Holy Ghost to the Devil.

And that this is the ground why our Saviour chargeth them with this sin against the Holy Ghost, is yet more plain from St. *Mark*, *Mark* 3. 28, 29, 30, *Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said he hath an unclean Spirit.* That is, because the Pharisees charged him to be a Magician, and to have a familiar Spirit, by whose assistance he did those works, when in truth he did them by the Spirit of God, therefore our Saviour declares them guilty

guilty of this ſin of blaſpheming the Holy Ghoſt, which ſhould never be forgiven.

So that the nature of this ſin did conſiſt in a moſt malicious oppoſition to the utmoſt evidence that could be given to the truth of any Religion. Our bleſſed Saviour to ſhew that he was ſent by God, and came from him, wrought miracles, ſuch as did plainly evidence a divine power and preſence accompanying of him. For in St. *Luke* he is ſaid to do them *by the finger of God*, Luke 11.20, *By the finger of God*, that is, to do ſuch things as were an undeniable evidence of the divine power and preſence. And this is the utmoſt teſtimony that God ever gave to any perſon that was ſent by him. And the Phariſees were eye-witneſſes of thoſe miracles which our Saviour wrought, ſo that they could not deny them: Yet ſuch was their oppoſition to him and his Doctrine, that, though they ſaw theſe things done by him, and could not deny the reality of them, yet rather than they would own him to be the *Meſſias*, and his Doctrine to come from God, they moſt maliciouſly and unreaſonably aſcribed them to the power of the Devil. And this was the blaſphemy which they were guilty of againſt the Holy Ghoſt. And herein lay the greatneſs of their ſin, in reſiſting the e-

vidence of those miracles which were so plainly wrought by the Holy Ghost; and which though themselves saw, yet they maliciously imputed them to the Devil, rather than they would be convinced by them. And this is so very plain, that hardly any man that considers our Saviours discourse upon this occasion can otherwise determine the nature of this sin; especially if he do but attend to those remarkable words which I cited before (*Mark* 3. 29,) *but he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation; because they said he hath an unclean spirit.* I come now to the

III. *Third* thing I propounded, *namely*, in what sense this sin is here said to be peculiarly *unpardonable?* For this our Saviour positively affirms to be in this different from all other sins, that it is capable of no pardon: *I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men:* And to shew what he means by the not forgiving of it, he tells us, that eternal punishment shall follow it in the other World. *Whosoever speaketh a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost it shall never be*

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forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come. Which St. *Mark* expresseth more plainly, that it shall bring those who are guilty of it to *eternal damnation*, *Mark* 3. 29, *He that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is liable to eternal damnation.* So that when our Saviour says, *it shall never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come*, he does not intend to insinuate that some sins which are not forgiven in this world, may be forgiven in the other: but in these words he either alludes to the opinion of the *Jews* concerning the effect of the highest excommunication, the sentence whereof they held not to be reversible, neither in this world nor the other; or else the reason of this expression may probably be to meet with a common and false opinion amongst the *Jews*, which was, that some sins which are not pardoned to men in this life, may by sacrifices be expiated in the other; and therefore he says it shall never be forgiven, neither in this world nor the other. And St. *Mark* more plainly, that those who are guilty of it shall *never have forgiveness*, but *be liable to eternal damnation.* So that our Saviour's meaning seems plainly to be this, that this sin is altogether incapable of forgiveness. I know

ſome have endeavoured to mollifie this matter, but (I think) without ſufficient reaſon. *Grotius* underſtands the words *comparatively*, that any ſort of ſin ſhall ſooner be forgiven than this againſt the Holy Ghoſt; and that our Saviour only intended to expreſs the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of this ſin above others; in which reſpect the pardon of it would be more difficult than of any other ſin; but yet that the caſe of ſuch a perſon is not abſolutely deſperate: But if our Saviour had intended to ſay that this ſin was abſolutely unpardonable, I would fain know how could he have expreſſed the matter in higher fuller words? Dr. *Hammond* mollifies the words another way; that this ſin ſhall never be pardoned but upon a *particular repentance* for it: As if our Saviour's meaning was, that a general repentance, which was ſufficient for ſins of Ignorance, would not be ſufficient in this caſe, but there muſt be a particular repentance for it, without which it would never be pardoned. But this is by no means agreeable to the ſcope of our Saviour's diſcourſe: Becauſe he plainly intends to difference this from all other ſorts of ſins, I ſay unto you, *all manner of ſin and blaſphemy*, ſhall be forgiven unto men. But according to this in-

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terpretation our Saviour must mean, that all other sins would be forgiven upon a general repentance; which is not true, for there are many other sins besides sins of Ignorance; there are wilful and heinous sins, such as wilful murder and adultery and blasphemy, (that only excepted which is against the *Holy Ghost*) and the like gross sins, which all Divines hold shall not be forgiven, but upon a *particular repentance.* So that this interpretation does not sufficiently difference this sin from all other sorts of sins, which yet it is very plain our Saviour intended to do. It remains then that these words must in all reason be understood absolutely; that the persons that are guilty of this great sin shall never have it forgiven to them. And it may be this will not seem so harsh, when we have considered in the

IV. *Fourth* place, *how* it comes to pass that this sin is above all others incapable of pardon: And that, upon these two accounts.

First, Because by this sin men resist their last remedy, and oppose the best and utmost means of their conviction. What can God be imagined to do more to convince a man of a Divine Revelation, or of the truth of any Doctrine or message that comes from him,

him, than to work miracles to this purpose And what greater assurance can men have that miracles are wrought, than to be eye-witnesses of them themselves? And if men will resist such evidence, what can God do more for their satisfaction? If when men see plain miracles wrought, they will say that it is not the power of God that does them, but the power of the Devil: And if when men see the Devils cast out, they will say that the Devil conspires against himself, this is to outface the Sun at Noon-day, and there is no way left to convince such perverse persons of the truth of any Divine Revelation. So that there is no remedy, but such persons must continue in their opposition to the truth. For this is such a sin as does in its own nature shut out and prevent all remedy. And he that thus perversely and maliciously opposeth the truth, must upon the same grounds unavoidably continue in his opposition to it; because there is nothing left to be done for his conviction, more than is already done. If God should send a person immediately from heaven to him, to convince him of his errour, he can give him no greater testimony that he comes from God than miracles: And if when God enables that person to work these by the power

power of his Spirit, this man will obſtinately impute them to the power of the Devil, he defears all the imaginable means of his own conviction. So that it is no wonder if that ſin be unpardonable, which reſiſts the laſt and utmoſt means which God hath ever yet thought fit to uſe to bring men to repentance and ſalvation. And if God were willing to reveal himſelf, and the way to pardon and ſalvation to ſuch a one, he doth by this very temper and diſpoſition render himſelf incapable of being ſatisfied and convinced concerning any divine Revelation.

Secondly, Becauſe this ſin is of that high nature that God is therefore juſtly provoked to withdraw his grace from ſuch perſons; and, it is probable, reſolved ſo to do: without which grace they will continue impenitent. There is no doubt but God, if he will, can work ſo powerfully upon the minds of men by his grace and Spirit, as to convince the moſt obſtinate: and ſuppoſing them to be convinced and repent, it cannot be denied but that they would be forgiven. And therefore, when our Saviour here ſays, they ſhall not be forgiven, it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that he means, that when perſons are come to that degree of obſtinacy and malice, God

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will (as justly he may) withdraw his grace from them: *His spirit will not strive with them*, to overcome their obstinacy; but will leave them to the byass of their own preverse and malicious minds; which will still engage them in a further opposition to the truth, and finally sink them in perdition. So that being deserted by God, and for want of the necessary help and aid of his grace (justly withdrawn from them) continuing finally impenitent, they become incapable of forgiveness both in this world and that which is to come. And there is nothing that can seem harsh or unreasonable in this, to those who grant (as I think all men do) that God may be so provoked by men, as justly to withdraw his grace from them in this life, that grace which is necessary to their repentance. And surely if any provocation be likely to do it, this cannot be denied to be of all others the greatest, obstinately and maliciously to oppose the utmost evidence that God ever gave to the truth of any Doctrine revealed by him. And of this the *Pharisees*, who are here charged with this sin against the Holy Ghost, were notoriously guilty, in resisting the clear evidence of our Saviours miracles.

And thus I have done with the *four* things

things I propounded to enquire into from these words, *Namely*, The difference between speaking against the Son of man, and speaking against the Holy Ghost; wherein the nature of this sin or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost doth consist; and in what sense this sin is said to be unpardonable; and upon what account it is so, *Namely*, because men by this sin resist their last remedy, and oppose the best and utmost means of their conviction: And because it may reasonably be supposed, that upon a provocation of this high nature God may, and is resolved to withdraw that grace from such persons which is necessary to their repentance, without which their sin remains for ever unpardonable.

All that now remains is to make this discourse some way or other useful to our selves. And it may very well serve to these *two* purposes. *First*, to comfort some very good and pious persons who are liable to despair out of an apprehension that they have committed *this sin*. *Secondly*, To caution others against the approaches to it.

1. *First*, To comfort some very good and pious persons, who are liable to despair upon an apprehension that they have committed this great and unpardonable sin; and

and consequently, are utterly incapable of ever being restored to the mercy and favour of God. And nothing can be more for the comfort of such persons than to understand aright what the nature of this sin was, and wherein the heinousness of it doth consist; which I have endeavoured to manifest. And if this be the Nature of it which I have declared, as it seems very plain that it is, then I cannot see how any person *now* is likely to be in those circumstances as to be capable of committing it. And being a sin of so heinous a nature, and declared by our Saviour to be absolutely unpardonable, there is no reason to extend it beyond the case to which our Saviour applies it; which was the resisting of the evidence of the miracles which were wrought for the truth of Christianity, by those who were eye-witnesses of them, *that is*, by those who had the utmost assurance of them that humane nature is capable of. And not only a bare resistance of that evidence, but with a very malicious circumstance, so as to impute those works which were wrought by the *Holy Ghost*, to the power of the *Devil*. This was the case of the *Pharisees*, whom our Saviour chargeth with this sin. And no body hath warrant to extend this sin any further

further than this case: and without good warrant it would be the most uncharitable thing in the world to extend it any further.

That which comes nearest to it, both in the heinousness of the crime, and the unpardonableness of it, is *total Apostasie from Christianity* after the embracing of it, and full conviction of the truth of it. And this the Scripture seems to place, if not in the same rank, yet, very near to it. And of this the Apostle speaks very often in the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews* under the name of *unbelief*, and *sin* by way of eminence, as being the great *sin* that Christians were in danger of falling into, call'd in that *Epistle* (*Heb.* 12. 1.) ἡ εὐπερίστατος ἁμαρτία, *the sin* which Christians, by reason of the *circumstances* they were then in, were especially subject to: And he parallels it with the case of the *Jews* in the wilderness, concerning whom *God sware that they should not enter into his rest, namely*, the earthly *Canaan*, which was a type of *Heaven*, Chap. 3. ver. 18. And Chap. 6. ver. 4, 5, 6, more expressly. *For it is impossible that those who were once enlightned, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers*

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of the world to come, if they should fall away, to renew them again to repentance. Where by *impossible*, the least that can be meant is, that it is extremely difficult for such persons to recover themselves by repentance. And 'tis observable that those persons are said to have been *partakers of the Holy Ghost*; by which is meant, that they were either endued with a power of miracles by the *Holy Ghost*, or were under the conviction of them as having seen them wrought by others. So that this Apostasie may be said in that respect to be *a sin against the Holy Ghost.* So likewise, *Chap.* 10. *ver.* 26, *If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledg of the truth* (that is, if we apostatize from Christianity after we have embraced the profession of it, as appears plainly from the scope of the Apostles discourse) *there remains no more sacrifice for sin:* which expression declares this sin either to be unpardonable, or something very like it. And at the 29. *vers.* Those persons are said to *tread under foot the Son of God, and to do despite unto the Spirit of Grace.* Which signifies that the sin there spoken of is more immediately committed against the Holy Spirit of God. St. *Peter* likewise declares the great danger of this sin, 2 *Pet.* 2. 20, *If after they have escaped the*

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pollutions of the world through the knowledg of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. St. *John* likewise seems to speak of this *sin* of *Apostacy*, and to call it *a sin unto death*: Discouraging Christians rather, from praying for those who were fallen into it; which gives great suspicion that he looked upon it as hardly pardonable, 1 *John* 5.16, *If any man see his brother sin a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for those that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it.* Now that by *the sin unto death*, the *Apostle* here means *Apostacy* from the *Christian Religion* to the *Heathen Idolatry*, seems extremely probable from what follows, *ver.* 18, *We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, but keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not*; that is, he preserveth himself from Idolatry, which the Devil had seduced the world into, *ver.* 19, *And we know that we are of God; aud the whole world lieth in wickedness*, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, *in the wicked one*; that is, is under the power of the Devil: *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us understanding to know him that is true*; that is, to

distinguish between the true God and Idols. And then it follows, *this is the true God, and eternal life: Little children, keep your selves from Idols.* Which last caution is a key to the understanding of all the rest; and makes it very probable that the sin unto death is Apostacy from Christianity unto Idolatry: Otherwise it is hard to imagine how the last clause comes in; *Little children, keep your selves from Idols.* And this is that sin which of all other approacheth nearest to this *sin against the Holy Ghost*, which our Saviour speaks of; and concerning the pardonableness of which the Scripture seems to speak very doubtfully. But if it were of the same unpardonable nature, yet this can be no trouble to those persons I am speaking of, who cannot but know themselves to be far enough from the guilt of this sin.

As for those other sins which by some are taken to be the sins against the Holy Ghost, they are either such as no man is capable of committing, as *a malicious opposition to the truth when I am convinced and know it to be the truth:* For this is a contradiction. Because to know any thing to be the truth is to believe it to be so: and therefore no man can disbelieve it while he

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believes it to be truth. Or elſe, they are ſuch as no man can know he is guilty of in this life; as, *final impenitency*; which ſuppoſeth a man to live and die without repentance. Or elſe, ſuch as I think no good man is incident to; as, *a malicious and perverſe oppoſing of the truth after ſufficient means of conviction.* However, none of theſe are that which the Scripture deſcribes to be the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, as I have already ſhewn.

But ſtill there are two things which uſually trouble honeſt and well-meaning perſons; but are rather the effects of Melancholy than any reaſonable ground of trouble. Some think that every *deliberate ſin* againſt knowledg, and after conviction, is *the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt*. This is acknowledged to be a very great aggravation of ſin, and ſuch as calls for a great and particular repentance; but does by no means render a man incapable of forgiveneſs. Others are troubled with *blaſphemous thoughts*, and thoſe they think to be the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt*. But this is generally the meer effect of Melancholy. And the perſons that are troubled with theſe black thoughts are no ways conſenting to them; but they riſe in their minds perfectly againſt their wills, and without

any approbation of theirs: And in this case they are so far from being the unpardonable sin, that I hope, yea and verily believe they are no sins at all, but the meer effects of a bodily distemper; and no more imputed to us, than the wild and idle ravings of a man in a frenzy or a fever: And God forbid that the natural effects of a bodily disease should bring guilt upon our souls. So that these persons have reason enough for comfort; but the misery is, their present distemper renders them incapable of it.

2. *Secondly*, The other Use I would make of this discourse is, to caution men against the *degrees and aprroaches* of this sin. For if the sin against the Holy Ghost be of such a high nature and so unpardonable, then all approaches to it are very dreadful. Such as are, *profane scoffing at Religion*, and the *Holy Spirit* of God which dwells in good men: *Abuse of the holy Scriptures*, which were indited by the Spirit of God: *Perverse Infidelity*, notwithstanding all the evidence which we have for the Truth of Christianity, and sufficicent assurance of the Miracles wrought for the confirmation of it, brought down to us by credible History, though we were not eye-witnesses of them: *Obstinacy in a*

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sinful and vicious course, notwithstanding all the motives and arguments of the Gospel to perswade men to repentance. *Sinning against the clear conviction of our Consciences, and the motions and suggestions of God's Holy Spirit* to the contrary: *Malicious opposing of the Truth*, when the Arguments for it are very plain and evident to any impartial and unprejudiced mind; and when he that opposeth the Truth, hath no clear satisfaction in his own mind to the contrary, but suffers himself to be furiously and headily carried on in his opposition to it. These are all sins of a very high nature, and of the nearest affinity with this great and unpardonable sin, of any that can easily be instanced in. And though God, to encourage the repentance of men, have not declared them unpardonable, yet they are great provocations; and if they be long continued in, we know not how soon God may withdraw his grace from us, and suffer us to be *hardned through the deceitfulness of sin*.

Be ready then to entertain the truth of God, whenever it is fairly propounded to thee; and with such evidence, as thou art willing to accept in other matters, where thou hast no prejudice nor interest to the contrary. Do nothing contrary to

thy known duty, but be careful in all things to obey the convictions of thine own conſcience, and to yeild to the good motions and ſuggeſtions of God's *Holy Spirit*, who works ſecretly upon the minds of men, and inſpires us many times gently with good thoughts and inclinations, and is griev'd when we do not comply with them; and after many repulſes will at laſt withdraw himſelf from us, and leave us to be aſſaulted by the temptations of the Devil, and to be hurried away by our own luſts into ruin and perdition.

Acts X. 38.

——Who went about doing good.

WHen Almighty God designed the Reformation of the World, and the restoring of Man to the Image of God, the Pattern after which he was first made, he did not think it enough to give us the most perfect Laws of holiness and vertue; but hath likewise set before us a living Pattern, and a familiar Example, to excite and encourage us, to go before us and shew us the way, and, as it were, to lead us by the hand in the obedience of those Laws. Such is the Sovereign Authority of God over men, that he might, if he had pleased, have only given us a Law written with his own hand, as he did to the people of *Israel* from Mount *Sinai*:

but ſuch is his Goodneſs, that he hath ſent a great Embaſſadour from Heaven to us, *God manifeſted in the fleſh*, to declare and interpret his will and pleaſure; and not only ſo, but to fulfil that Law himſelf, the obſervation whereof he requires of us. The bare Rules of a good life are a very dead and ineffectual thing in compariſon of a living Example, which ſhews us the poſſibility and practicableneſs of our Duty; both that it may be done, and how to do it. Religion indeed did always conſiſt in an Imitation of God, and in our reſemblance of thoſe excellencies which ſhine forth in the beſt and moſt perfect Being: but we may imitate him now with much greater eaſe and advantage, ſince God was pleaſed to become Man, on purpoſe to ſhew us how men may become like to God. And this is one great End for which the Son of God came into the world, and *was made fleſh, and dwelt among us*, and converſed ſo long and familiarly with mankind; that in his own Perſon and Life he might give us the Example of all that holineſs and vertue which his Laws require of us. And as he was in nothing liker the Son of God than in being and doing good; ſo is he in nothing a fitter Pattern for our imita-

imitation, than in that excellent character given of him here in the Text, that *He went about doing good.*

In which words two things offer themselves to our consideration.

First, Our Saviour's great Work and Business in the world, which was, to *do good:* ὃς διῆλθεν εὐεργετῶν, Who employed himself in being a benefactour to mankind. This refers more especially to his healing the bodily diseases and infirmities of men. *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the Devil.* Intimating to us by this instance of his doing good, that he who took so much pains to rescue mens Bodies from the power and possession of the Devil, would not let their Souls remain under his tyranny. But though the Text instanceth only in one particular, yet this general expression of *doing good* comprehends all those several ways whereby he was beneficial to mankind.

Secondly, Here is his Diligence and Industry in this work, *He went about doing good*; he made it the great business and constant imployment of his life. I shall propound to you the Pattern of our Saviour in both these particulars.

I. His

I. His great Work and Buſineſs in the world was, to *do good*. The moſt pleaſant and delightful, the moſt happy and glorious work in the world. It is a work of a large extent, and of an univerſal influence; and comprehends in it all thoſe ways whereby we may be uſeful and beneficial to one another. And indeed it were pity that ſo good a thing ſhould be confined within narrow bounds and limits. It reacheth to the Souls of men, and to their Bodies; and is converſant in all thoſe ways and kinds whereby we may ſerve the Temporal or Spiritual good of our neighbour, and promote his preſent and his future happineſs. What our Bleſſed Saviour did in this kind, and we, in imitation of him, ought to do, I ſhall reduce to theſe two Heads. *Firſt*, Doing good to the Souls of men, and endeavouring to promote their ſpiritual and eternal happineſs. *Secondly*, The procuring of their Temporal good, and contributing as much as may be to their happineſs in this preſent life.

1. Doing good to the *Souls* of men, and endeavouring to promote their *ſpiritual* and *eternal* happineſs, by good Inſtruction, and by good Example.

Firſt, By good *Inſtruction*. And under Inſtruction I comprehend all the means of bring-

bringing men to the knowledg of their duty, and exciting them to the practice of it; by instructing their Ignorance, and removing their Prejudices, and rectifying theirMistakes, by Persuasion, and by Reproof; and by making lasting provision for the promoting of these Ends.

By instructing mens Ignorance. And this is a duty which every man owes to another,as he hath opportunity; but especially to those who are under our care and charge, our Children and Servants, and near Relations; those over whom we have a special authority, and a more immediate influence. This our Blessed Saviour made his great work in the world, to instruct all sorts of persons in the things which concerned the Kingdom of God, and to direct them in the way to eternal happiness; by publick teaching, and by private conversation, and by taking occasion from the common occurrences of humane life, and every object that presented it self to him, to instil good counsel into men, and to raise their minds to the consideration of divine and heavenly things. And though this was our Saviour's great Employment, and is theirs more particularly whose office it is to teach others: yet every man hath private opportunities

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of instructing others, by admonishing them of their duty, and by directing them to the best means and helps of knowledg; such as are Books of Piety and Religion, with which they that are rich may furnish those who are unable to provide them for themselves.

And then by removing mens Perjudices against the Truth, and rectifying their Mistakes. This our Saviour found very difficult; the generality of those with whom he had to do, being strongly prejudiced against Him and his Doctrine by false Principles, which they had taken in by education, and been trained up to by their Teachers. And therefore he used a great deal of meekness in instructing those that opposed themselves, and exercised abundance of patience in bearing with the infirmities of men, and their dulness and slowness of capacity to receive the Truth.

And this is great Charity, to consider the inveterate Prejudices of men; especially those which are rooted in education, and which men are confirmed in by the reverence they bear to those that have been their Teachers. And great allowanee is to be given to men in this case, and time to bethink themselves, and to consider better. For no man that is in an Errour

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thinks he is ſo: and therefore if we go violently to rend their Opinions from them, they will but hold them ſo much the faſter; but if we have patience to unrip them by degrees, they will at laſt fall in pieces of themſelves.

And when this is done, the way is open for Counſel and Perſwaſion. And this our Saviour adminiſtred in a moſt powerful and effectual manner, by encouraging men to Repentance, and by repreſenting to them the infinite advantages of obeying his Laws, and the dreadful and dangerous conſequences of breaking of them. And theſe are arguments fit to work upon mankind, becauſe there is ſomething within us that conſents to the equity and reaſonableneſs of God's Laws. So that whenever we perſwade men to their duty, how backward ſoever they may be to the practice of it, being ſtrongly addicted to a contrary courſe; yet we have this certain advantage, that we have their Conſciences and the moſt inward ſenſe of their minds on our ſide, bearing witneſs, that what we counſel and perſwade them to, is for their good.

And if need be, we muſt add Reproof to Counſel. This our Saviour did with great freedom, and ſometimes with ſharpneſs and ſeverity, according to the condition of the perſons he had to deal with al. But becauſe of his great Authority, being *a Teacher* immediately *ſent from God*, and of his intimate

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knowledg of the hearts of men, he is not a pattern to us in all the circumſtances of diſcharging this duty; which, if any other, requires great prudence and diſcretion, if we intend to do good, the only end to be aimed at in it. For many are fit to be reproved whom yet every man is not fit to reprove; and in that caſe we muſt get it done by thoſe that are fit, and great regard muſt be had to the time, and other circumſtances of doing it, ſo as it may moſt probably have its effect.

I will mention but one way of Inſtruction more, and that is, by making laſting proviſion for that purpoſe: as, by founding Schools of learning, eſpecially to teach the poor to read, which is the Key of knowledg; by building of Churches and endowing them; by buying or giving in Impropriations, or the like. Theſe are large and laſting ways of teaching and inſtructing others, which will continue when we are dead and gone; as it is ſaid of *Abel*, that *being dead, he yet ſpeaks*. And this our Saviour virtually did, by appointing his Apoſtles after he had left the World to *go and teach all Nations*, and ordering a conſtant Succeſſion of Teachers in his Church, to inſtruct men in the Chriſtian Religion, together with an honourable Maintenance for them. This we cannot do in the way that he did, who had *all power in heaven and earth*; but we may be ſubſervient to this

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Design in the ways that I have mentioned. Which I humbly commend to the consideration of those whom God hath blessed with great Estates, and made capable of effecting such great works of Charity.

Secondly, Another way of doing good to the Souls of men is by good *Example*. And this our Blessed Saviour was in the utmost perfection. For he *fulfilled all righteousness, had no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* And this we should endeavour to be, as far as the frailty of our nature and imperfection of our present state wil suffer. For good example is an unspeakable benefit to mankind, and hath a secret power and influence upon those with whom we converse, to form them into the same disposition and manners. It is a living Rule, that teacheth men without trouble, and lets them see their faults without open reproof and upbraiding. Besides that it adds great weight to a man's counsel and perswasion, when we see that he adviseth nothing but what he does; nor exacts any thing from others from which he himself desires to be excused. As, on the contrary, nothing is more cold and insignificant, than good counsel from a bad man, one that does not obey his own precepts, nor follow the advice which he is so forward to give to others.

These are the several ways of doing good to the *Souls* of men; wherein we, who are

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the Diſciples of the Bleſſed *Jeſus*, ought, in imitation of his Example, to exerciſe our ſelves according to our ſeveral capacities and opportunities. And this is the nobleſt Charity, and the greateſt kindneſs that can be ſhewn to humane nature; it is in the moſt excellent ſenſe, to *give eyes to the blind*, to *ſet the priſoners at liberty*, to reſcue men out of the ſaddeſt ſlavery and captivity, and to *ſave Souls from death*. And it is the moſt laſting and durable benefit; becauſe it is to do men good to all eternity.

2. The other way of being beneficial to others is, by procuring their *Temporal* good, and contributing to their happineſs in this preſent life. And this, in ſubordination to our Saviour's great deſign of bringing men to eternal Happineſs, was a great part of his buſineſs and employment in this world. He went about *healing all manner of ſickneſſes and diſeaſes*, and reſcuing the Bodies of men from the power and poſſeſſion of the Devil.

And though we cannot be beneficial to men in that miraculous manner that he was; yet we may be ſo in the uſe of ordinary means: We may comfort the afflicted, and vindicate the oppreſſed, and do a great many acts of Charity which our Saviour, by reaſon of his poverty, could not do without a miracle: We may ſupply the neceſſities of thoſe that are in want, *feed the hungry, and cloath the naked*, and

and *visit the sick*, and minister to them such comforts and remedies as they are not able to provide for themselves: We may take a Child that is poor and destitute of all advantages of education, and bring him up in the knowledg and fear of God; and without any great expence, put him into a way wherein, by his diligence and industry, he may arrive to a considerable fortune in the world, and be able afterwards to relieve hundreds of others. Men glory in raising great and magnificent Structures, and find a secret pleasure to see Sets of their own planting to grow up and flourish: But surely it is a greater and more glorious work, to build up a Man, to see a Youth of our own planting, from the small beginnings and advantages we have given him, to grow up into a considerable fortune, to take root in the world, and to shoot up to such a height, and spread his branches so wide, that we who first planted him may our selves find comfort and shelter under his shadow. We may many times with a small liberality shore up a Family that is ready to fall, and struggles under such necessities, that it is not able to support it self. And if our minds were as great as sometimes our estates are, we might do great and publick works of a general and lasting advantage, and for which many generations to come might call us blessed.

And those who are in the lowest condition, may do great good to others by their Prayers, if they themselves be as good as they ought. For *the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* The intercession of those who are in favour with God (as all good men are) are not vain wishes, but many times effectual to procure that good for others, which their own endeavours could never have effected and brought about.

I have done with the First thing, The great Work and Business which our Blessed Saviour had to do in the world; and that was to *do good.* I proceed to the

II. Second thing contained in the Text, Our Saviour's Diligence and industry in this work, *He went about doing good.* He made it the great business and constant employment of his life; he travelled from one place to another to seek out opportunities of being useful and beneficial to mankind. And this will fully appear, if we briefly consider these following particulars.

First, How unwearied our blessed Saviour was in doing good. He made it his only business, and spent his whole life in it. He was not only ready to do good to those that came to him, and gave him opportunity for it, and besought him to do it; but went himself from one place to another, to seek out objects to exercise his Charity upon. He

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went to thoſe who could not, and to thoſe who would not come to him: for ſo it is written of him, *He came to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt.* He was contented to ſpend whole days in this work, to live in a crowd, and to be almoſt perpetually oppreſt with company: and when his Diſciples were moved at the rudeneſs of the people in preſſing upon him, he rebuked their impatience; and, for the pleaſure he took in doing good, made nothing of the trouble and inconvenience that attended it.

Secondly, If we conſider how much he denied himſelf in the chief comforts and conveniences of humane life, that he might do good to others. He neglected the ordinary refreſhments of nature, his meat and drink, and ſleep, that he might attend this work. He was at every bodie's beck and diſpoſal, to do them good. When he was doing cures in one place, he was ſent for to another; and he either went, or ſent healing to them, and did by his word at a diſtance what he could not come in perſon to do. Nay, he was willing to deny himſelf in one of the deareſt things in the world, his reputation and good name. He was contented to do good, though he was ill thought of and ill ſpoken of for it. He would not refuſe to do good on the Sabbath-day, though he was accounted profane for ſo doing. He knew how ſcandalous it was among

the *Jews* to keep company with Publicans and Sinners; and yet he would not decline ſo good a work, for all the ill words they gave him for it.

Thirdly, If we conſider the malicious oppoſition and ſiniſter conſtruction that his good deeds met withall. Never did ſo much goodneſs meet with ſo much enmity, *endure* ſo many affronts, and ſo much *contradiction of Sinners*. This great Benefactour of mankind was hated and perſecuted, as if he had been a publick Enemy. While he was inſtructing them in the meekeſt manner, they were ready to ſtone him for telling them the truth: and when the fame of his Miracles went abroad, though they were never ſo uſeful and beneficial to mankind, yet upon this very account they conſpire againſt him, and ſeek to take away his life. Whatever he ſaid or did, though never ſo innocent, never ſo excellent, had ſome bad interpretation put upon it; and the great and ſhining Vertues of his life were turned into Crimes and matter of accuſation. For his caſting out of Devils, he was called a Magician; for his endeavour to reclaim men from their vices, *a friend of Publicans and Sinners*; for his free and obliging converſation, *a wine-bibber and a glutton*. All the benefits which he did to men, and the bleſſings which he ſo liberally ſhed among the people, were conſtrued to be a deſign of Ambition

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and Popularity, and done with an intent in to move the people to Sedition, and to make himſelf a King: Enough to have diſcouraged the greateſt goodneſs, and have put a damp upon the moſt generous mind, and to make it ſick and weary of well-doing. For what more grievous, than to have all the good one does ill interpreted, and the beſt actions in the world made matter of calumny and reproach?

And then, Laſtly, If we conſider how chearfully, notwithſtanding all this, he preſevered and continued in well-doing. It was not only his buſineſs, but his delight; *I delight* (ſays he) *to do thy will, O my God.* The pleaſure which others take in the moſt natural actions of life, in eating and drinking when they are hungry, he took in doing good; it was *his meat and drink to do the will of his Father.* He plyed this work with ſo much diligence, as if he had been afraid he ſhould have wanted time for it. *I muſt work the work of him that ſent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.* And when he was approaching towards the hardeſt and moſt unpleaſant part of his Service, but of all others the moſt beneficial to us, I mean, his Death and Sufferings, he was not at eaſe in his mind till it was done; *How am I ſtraitned,* (ſays he) *till it be accompliſhed?* And juſt before his Suffering, with what Joy and Triumph

does he reflect upon the good he had done in his life? *Father, I have glorified thee upon earth, and have finished the work which thou hast given me to do.* What a blessed Pattern is here of diligence and industry in doing good? how fair and lovely a copy for Christians to write after?

And now that I have set it before you, it will be of excellent use to these two purposes: To shew us our Defects; and to excite us to our Duty.

I. To shew us our Defects. How does this blessed Example upbraid those who live in a direct contradiction to it; who, instead of *going about doing good*, are perpetually intent upon doing mischief; who are wise and active to do evil, but to do good have no inclination, no understanding? And those likewise, who, though they are far from being so bad, yet wholly neglect this blessed work of doing good? They think it very fair to do no evil, to hurt and injure no man: but if Preachers will be so unreasonable as to require more, and will never be satisfied till they have perswaded them out of their estate, and to give to the poor till they have almost impoverish'd themselves, they desire to be excused from this importunity. But we are not so unreasonable neither. We desire to put them in mind, that to be charitable according to our power is an indispensable du-

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ty of Religion: that we are commanded not only to abſtain from evil, but to do good; and that our Bleſſed Saviour hath given us the example of both; he did not only *do no ſin*, but *he went about doing good.* And upon this nice point it was, that the young rich man in the Goſpel and his Saviour parted. He had *kept the commandments from his youth, Thou ſhalt not kill, Thou ſhalt not commit adultery, Thou ſhalt not ſteal:* he had been very careful of the negative part of Religion; But, when it came to parting with his Eſtate and *giving to the poor*, this he thought too hard a condition, and upon this he forſook our Saviour, and forfeited the Kingdom of heaven. And it is very conſiderable, and ought to be often and ſeriouſly thought upon, that our Saviour, deſcribing to us the Day of Judgment, repreſents the great Judg of the world acquitting and condemning men according to the good which they had done, or neglected to do, in ways of mercy and charity; for feeding the hungry, and cloathing the naked, and viſiting the ſick, or for neglecting to do theſe things: Than which nothing can more plainly and effectually declare to us the neceſſity of doing good, in order to the obtaining of eternal Happineſs.

There are many, indeed, who do not altogether neglect the doing of this work, who

yet do in a great measure prevent and hinder themselves from doing it as they ought, under a pretence of being employed about other Duties and parts of Religion. They are so taken up with the exercises of Piety and Devotion in private and publick, with Prayer, and reading and hearing Sermons, and preparing themselves for the Sacrament, that they have scarce any leisure to mind the doing of good and charitable offices to others: or, if they have, they hope God will pardon his servants in this thing, and accept of their Piety and Devotion instead of all. But they ought to consider, that when these two parts of Religion come in competition, Devotion is to give way to Charity, *Mercy* being better than *Sacrifice*: that the great End of all the Duties of Religion, Prayer, and reading and hearing the Word of God, and receiving the holy Sacrament, is to dispose and excite us to do good, to make us more ready and forward to every good work: and that it is the greatest mockery in the world, upon pretence of using the means of Religion, to neglect the end of it; and because we are always preparing our selves to do good, to think that we are for ever excused from doing any.

Others are taken up in contending for the Faith, and spend all their zeal and heat about some Controversies in Religion; and there-

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fore they think it but reaſonable that they ſhould be excuſed from thoſe meaner kind of Duties, becauſe they ſerve God, as they imagine, in a higher and more excellent way; as thoſe who ſerve the King in his Wars uſe to be exempted from Taxes and Offices. But do thoſe men conſider upon what kind of Duties more eſpecially, our Bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles lay the great weight and ſtreſs of Religion? that it is to the Meek and Merciful and Peaceable that our Saviour pronounceth Bleſſedneſs? that *pure Religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction?* that *the wiſdom which is from above is full of mercy and good works?* Theſe are the great and weighty things of Religion, which, whatever elſe we do, ought not to be left undone. Do they conſider, that a right Faith is wholly in order to a good Life, and is of no value any farther than it hath an influence upon it? ſo that whatever other Duties we may be obliged to, nothing can excuſe us from this. How much better is it to do good, to be really uſeful and beneficial to others, and how much more clearly and certainly our duty, than to quarrel about doubtful and uncertain opinions? Were men Chriſtians indeed, they would be ſo much delighted and taken up with this better work, (more acceptable to God, and more profita-

ble to men) that they could not find leisure, or, if they could, they could not find in their hearts to employ all their time and zeal about things which are at so great a distance from the life and heart of Religion, as most of those Questions are which Christians at this day contend and languish about. Were we possessed with the true spirit of Christianity, these would be but dry and insipid and tastless things to us, in comparison of the blessed employment of doing good in a more real and substantial way. If the sincere love of God and our neighbour were but once throughly kindled in our hearts, these pure and heavenly flames would in a great measure extinguish the unchristian heats of dispute and contention; Fires here below are ready to languish and go out, when the Sun in his full strength shines upon them.

II. But the hardest part of my task is yet behind (and it is strange it should be so): And that is, to perswade us to the imitation of this Blessed Example. Let us *go and do likewise*; *let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus*; let us tread in the steps of the great God and the best Man that ever was, our Blessed Saviour, who *went about doing good*. Methinks the work it self is of that nature, that men should not need to be courted to it by perswasion, nor urged by importunity. The very proposal of the thing, and the Pattern

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which I have ſet before you, is temptation and allurement enough to a generous and well-diſpoſed mind. But yet to inflame you the more to ſo good a work, be pleaſed to dwell with me a little upon theſe following Conſiderations.

Firſt, It is an argument of a great and generous mind, to employ our ſelves in doing good, to extend our thoughts and care to the concernments of others, and to uſe our power and endeavours for their benefit and advantage: Becauſe it ſhews an inclination and deſire in us, to have others happy as well as our ſelves.

Thoſe who are of a narrow and envious ſpirit, of a mean and ſordid diſpoſition, love to contract themſelves within themſelves, and like the hedg-hog, to ſhoot out their quills at every one that comes near them. They take care of no body but themſelves; and fooliſhly think their own Happineſs the greater, becauſe they have it alone and to themſelves. But the nobleſt and moſt heavenly diſpoſitions think themſelves happieſt when others ſhare with them in their happineſs. Of all Beings God is the fartheſt removed from Envy; and the nearer any creature approacheth to him in bleſſedneſs, the farther is it off from this helliſh quality and diſpoſition. It is the temper of the Devil, to grudg happineſs to others; he envied that

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Man ſhould be in Paradiſe, when He was caſt out of Heaven.

J. Hales of Eaton Other Perfections are (as one ſays) of a more melancholick and ſolitary diſpoſition, and ſhine brighteſt when they are alone, or attained to but by a few; once make them common, and they loſe their luſtre. But it is the nature of goodneſs, to communicate it ſelf; and the farther it ſpreads, the more glorious it is. God reckons it as one of his moſt glorious Titles, as the brighteſt Gem in his Diadem, *The Lord mighty to ſave*. He delights not to ſhew his Soveraignty in ruining the innocent, and deſtroying helpleſs creatures; but in reſcuing them out of the jaws of Hell and deſtruction. To the Devil belongs the Title of *The Deſtroyer*.

Without this quality of goodneſs, all other Perfections would change their nature, and loſe their excellency. Great Power and Wiſdom would be terrible, and raiſe nothing but dread and ſuſpicion in us: For Power without Goodneſs would be Tyranny and Oppreſſion, and Wiſdom would become Craft and Treachery. A Being endued with Knowledg and Power, and yet wanting Goodneſs, would be nothing elſe but an irreſiſtable Evil, and an omnipotent Miſchief. We admire Knowledg, and are afraid of Power, and ſuſpect Wiſdom; but we can heartily love nothing but Goodneſs, or ſuch Perfections as

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are in conjunction with it. For Knowledg and Power may be in a nature most contrary to God's; the Devil hath these perfections in an excelling degree. When all is done, nothing argues a great and generous mind but only Goodness; which is a propension and disposition to make others happy, and a readiness to do them all the good offices we can.

Secondly, To do good is the most pleasant employment in the World. It is natural; and whatever is so, is delightful. We do like our selves whenever we relieve the wants and distresses of others. And therefore this Vertue among all other hath peculiarly entituled it self to the name of *Humanity*. We answer our own Nature, and obey our Reason, and shew our selves Men, in shewing Mercy to the miserable. Whenever we consider the evils and afflictions of others, we do with the greatest reason collect our duty from our nature and inclination, and make our own wishes and desires and expectations from others, a law and rule to our selves. And this is pleasant, to follow our nature, and to gratifie the importunate dictates of our own Reason. So that the benefits we do to others are not more welcom to them that receive them, than they are delightful to us that do them. We ease our own nature and bowels, whenever we help and relieve those who are in want and necessity. As, on the contrary,

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no man, that hath not diveſted himſelf of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling ſome pain in himſelf. There is no ſenſual pleaſure in the World comparable to the delight and ſatisfaction that a good man takes in doing good. This *Cato* in *Tully* boaſts of, as the great comfort and joy of his old age; *That nothing was more pleaſant to him, than the conſcience of a well-ſpent life, and the remembrance of many benefits and kindneſſes done to others.* Senſual pleaſures are not laſting, but preſently vaniſh and expire: but that is not the worſt of them, they leave a ſting behind them, as the pleaſure goes off:

——— *Succedit frigida cura,*

Sadneſs and melancholly come in the place of it, guilt and trouble and repentance follow it. But the pleaſure of doing good remains after the thing is done, the thoughts of it lie eaſy in our minds, and the reflexion upon it afterwards does for ever miniſter joy and delight to us. In a word, that frame of mind which inclines us to do good, is the very temper and diſpoſition of happineſs. *Solomon*, after all his experience of worldly pleaſures, pitches at laſt upon this as the greateſt felicity of humane life, and the only good uſe that is to be made of a proſperous aud plentiful fortune, *Eccl.* 3. 12. *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoyce and do good in his life.* And

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a greater and a wiſer than *Solomon* hath ſaid, that *it is more bleſſed to give than to receive.*

Thirdly, To employ our ſelves in doing good, is to imitate the higheſt Excellency and perfection. It is to be like God, *who is good, and doth good*; and to be like him in that which he eſteems his greateſt glory, and that is, his Goodneſs. It is to be like the Son of God, who, when he took our nature upon him, and lived in the World, *went about doing good.* It is to be like the bleſſed Angels, whoſe great employment it is to be *miniſtring ſpirits for the good of others.* To be charitable and helpful and beneficial to others, is to be a good Angel, and a Saviour, and a God to men. And the Example of our bleſſed Saviour more eſpecially, is the great Pattern which our Religion propounds to us. And we have all the reaſon in the World to be in love with it; becauſe that very Goodneſs which it propounds to our imitation, was ſo beneficial to our ſelves: when we our ſelves feel and enjoy the happy effects of that good which he did in the World, this ſhould mightily endear the Example to us, and make us forward to imitate that love and kindneſs to which we are indebted for ſo many bleſſings, and upon which all our hopes of happineſs do depend.

And there is this conſiderable difference between our Saviour's charity to us, and

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ours to others: He did all purely for our ſakes, and for our benefit; whereas all the good we do to others is a greater good done to our ſelves. They indeed are beholden to us for the kindneſs we do them, and we to them for the opportunity of doing it. Every ignorant perſon that comes in our way to be inſtructed by us, every ſinner whom we reclaim, every poor and neceſſitous man whom we relieve, is a happy opportunity of doing good to our ſelves, and of *laying up for our ſelves a good treaſure againſt the time which is to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life.* By this principle the beſt and the happieſt man that ever was, governed his life and actions, eſteeming it *a more bleſſed thing to give than to receive.*

Fourthly, This is one of the greateſt and moſt ſubſtantial Duties of Religion; and next to the love and honour which we pay to God himſelf, the moſt acceptable ſervice that we can perform to him. It is one half of the Law, and next to the firſt and great Commandment, and very like unto it: like to it in the excellency of its nature, and in the neceſſity of its obligation. For *this commandment we have from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother alſo.* The firſt Commandment excels in the dignity of the object; but the Second hath the advantage in the reality of its effects. For *our righte-*

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ousness extendeth not to God, we can do him no real benefit; but our chariry to men is really useful and beneficial to them. For which reason God is contented, in many cases, that the external Honour and Worship which by his positive command he requires of us, should give way to that natural duty of Love and Mercy which we owe to one another. And to shew how great a value he puts upon Charity, he hath made it the great testimony of our Love to himself; and for want of it rejects all other professions of love to him as false and insincere. *If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

Fifthly, This is that which will give us the greatest comfort when we come to die. It will then be no pleasure to men to reflect upon the great estates they have got, and the great places they have been advanced to, because they are leaving these things, and they will stand them in no stead in the other world; *Riches profit not in the day of wrath:* But the conscience of well-doing will refresh our Souls even under the very pangs of death. With what contentment does a good man then look upon the good he hath done in his life? and with what confidence doth he look over into the other

world, where he hath provided for himself *bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not?* For though our estates will not follow us into the other world, our good works will; though we cannot carry our riches along with us, yet we may send them before us, to make way for our reception into everlasting habitations. In short, works of Mercy and Charity will comfort us at the hour of death, and plead for us at the day of Judgment, and procure for us at the hands of a merciful God a glorious recompence at the resurrection of the just. Which leads me to the

Last consideration I shall offer to you; which is, the reward of doing good both in this world and the other. If we believe God himself, he hath made more particular and encouraging promises to this grace and virtue, than to any other.

The advantages of it in This World are many and great. It is the way to derive a lasting blessing upon our estates. Acts of charity are the best Deeds of Settlement. We gain the prayers and blessings of those to whom we extend our charity; and it is no small thing to have *the blessing of them that are ready to perish to come upon us.* For God *hears the prayers of the destitute; and his ear is open to their cry.* Charity is a great security to us in times of evil: and that not

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only from the ſpecial promiſe and providence of God, which are engaged to preſerve from want thoſe that relieve the neceſſities of others; but likewiſe from the nature of the thing, which makes way for its own reward in this world. He that is charitable to others, provides a ſupply and retreat for himſelf in the day of diſtreſs: For he provokes mankind by his example, to like tenderneſs towards him; and prudently beſpeaks the commiſeration of others, againſt it comes to be his turn to ſtand in need of it. Nothing in this World makes a man more and ſurer friends than charity and bounty, and ſuch as will ſtand by us in the greateſt troubles and dangers. *For a good man* (ſays the Apoſtle) *one would even dare to die.* 'Tis excellent counſel of the Son of *Sirach*; *Lay up thy treaſure according to the Commandment of the Moſt high, and it ſhall bring thee more profit than gold. Shut up thy alms in thy ſtore-houſe, and it ſhall deliver thee from all affliction: It ſhall fight for thee againſt thine enemies, better than a mighty ſheild and ſtrong ſpear.* It hath ſometimes happened, that the obligation that men have laid upon others by their Charity, hath, in caſe of danger and extremity, done them more kindneſs than all the reſt of their Eſtate could do for them; and their Alms have literally delivered them from death.

But what is all this to the endless and unspeakable Happiness of the Next life; where the returns of doing good will be vastly great beyond what we can now expect or imagine! For God takes all the good we do to others as a debt upon himself; and he hath estate and treasure enough to satisfie the greatest obligations we can lay upon him. So that we have the Truth, and Goodness, and Sufficiency of God for our security, that what we scatter and sow in this kind, will grow up to a plentiful harvest in the other World: and that all our pains and expence in doing good for a few days, will be recompenced and crowned with the Joys and Glories of Eternity.

FINIS.

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Ὅσιος Ἐγκαινισμός, or a Treatise of holy dedication: both Personal and Domestick, the latter of which is (in specia) recommended

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Tantamen Medicum, de natura, Causis, Temporibus, differentis, signis, diacriticis Prognosticis, medelaquè.

Variolarum in gratiam Tyronum in medicina Exaratum. In duo decimo.